Summary

This story starts after "A Wedding" (10.25.14) when Kurt wakes up the next morning with a pounding headache and killer hangover. Why is Mercedes in his hotel room? Where is Blaine?

Season 6 AU - Both canon and non-canon elements for the season 6 timeline.
Season 5 is unchanged except that the "Previously Unaired Christmas" episode never happened, Kurt did not get a messed up tattoo, and the group agreed to meet up in New York four months later, not six.
Seasons 1-4 are unchanged.
Updates on Wednesdays.

Notes

For chapters 1-10:
Odd chapters center around Kurt's interactions with Mercedes and Sam.
Even chapters center around Blaine's interactions with them.
So, the events in chapters 1&2, 3&4, 5&6, 7&8, 9&10 take place at the same time, but in different locations.
Kurt woke up and looked around. It was dark, but there was enough faint light from the window that he could see just a little. He blinked his blurry eyes a few more times and realized that he was in a hotel room lying in a bed – he reached out and found no one else in the bed with him. His mind was foggy, but he lay still thinking. The last thing he could remember was – what was it – he was toasting his marriage with Mercedes. He rolled over and slipped the covers back and headed toward the bathroom.

When he came back out, he shielded his eyes from the bright light in the room. He found Mercedes sitting in the other bed in the room.

“Mercedes? What’s going on?” Kurt made his way back to the bed. “Can we talk about it in the dark? My head is pounding.”

“Sure. Take these first.” She handed him a bottle of water and some pain relievers. After he took them, she turned the lamp off that was on the nightstand between their beds and got back in the other bed. “Drinking so much tends to give people nasty hangovers.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” he deadpanned. “The last thing I remember is you and I were toasting my marriage to Blaine. Why am in a hotel room with you and not with him?”

“Well, mainly because I wanted a chance to talk to you sober before you had a chance to do anything permanent like actually marry Blaine.”

“We already got married.”

“Not legally. Your dad may be authorized by the state of Indiana to perform weddings, but you and Blaine didn’t have a marriage license. So, all the two of you did was repeat words in a ceremony. Without the marriage license, you’re not officially married. The two of you will have to head to a courthouse Monday - tomorrow morning and get a marriage license and then get officially married again, either by someone at the courthouse or someone else officially eligible to perform the ceremony.”

“Oh, right. I mean I knew that. God, my head is killing me. I hope those pills do something soon. So, you still didn’t tell me what you want to talk to me about.”

“First off, why did you break up with Blaine after you moved to New York?”

“I got really busy with my new life and I ignored him and he needed me and I wasn’t there for him.”

“What does that mean? That’s not a reason for you to break up with him. It’s not even a decent reason for him to break up with you. What happened?”

“He cheated on me.”

“And by ‘cheated’, you mean something more than kissing someone else and stopping?”

“I mean he had sex with someone else.”

“And that was your fault?”
“He said it was.”

“Kurt, you are not a stupid person. Why would you believe a statement like that?”

“Why wouldn’t I? Everyone’s always told me that I’m the lucky one. That he’s too good for me. That he could have anyone he wanted.”

“Think clearly, Kurt. Have there been other guys to show interest in you?”

“Adam.”

“Tell me about Adam.”

“He was too perfect.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean - he complimented me, he never complained about anything, he never said I should do something differently, he was always gentle…”

“I’m not liking how that makes Blaine sound.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why would you say those things made Adam too perfect? Doesn’t Blaine compliment you?”

“Not really. Well, I mean if I do something he suggested, then he will. Or if he wants…”

“Um hmm. The complaining?”

“He complains about a lot of things. I’m too flirty. I wear provocative clothing. I try to get the focus of everything on me. The list is long.”

“Okay. I’m assuming the doing things differently issue goes along with the complaining.”

“Yeah.”

“And the being gentle? I’m afraid to know the answer to that one, but let me hear it.”

“I don’t know. I mean after I got hurt in the alley, he sang to me at the hospital, but afterwards, a few days later in class he really came at me in stage combat.”

“I don’t like that, but that wasn’t really what I was asking.”

“Oh. Well, Adam always… I don’t feel comfortable answering this question. Adam and I never had sex, if that’s what you’re thinking.”

“Alright, but if you don’t feel comfortable answering it, doesn’t that say a lot in and of itself? I understand that private things are private and I won’t ask again, but I’m going to give you a couple of minutes to compare and contrast those private things in your own mind. I’ll be right back.” She got up and went to the bathroom and came back.

“Were there other guys that were interested?”

“Interested, as in asked me out?”

“Or that you caught looking at you like they thought you were hot or whatever.”
“Oh, well, Blaine always said that I was leading the guys in stage combat on, that I did things to attract attention to myself and gave the guys the impression that I was open to them pursuing me.”

“Did you?”

“No, not intentionally. Blaine is… He’s…”

“Jealous?”

“Yeah, but he also gets really upset. He confronted Elliott once and Elliott told me about it. He seemed concerned for my safety, but I told him that Blaine wasn’t abusive or anything.”

“I’m not so sure about that, Kurt.”

“What do you mean?”

“Give me a sec.” She pulled her phone out and pulled up a website. “Read through that list.”

Kurt took the phone from her. It took him a few minutes to read through the whole thing. He handed it back. “Don’t those things apply to a lot of people’s relationships?”

“No really, Kurt. Not healthy relationships.”

“Oh.”

They sat in silence for a while. Mercedes looked up another website. She handed her phone back to him. He took it and read through the article. He held onto the phone.

“You were there. You helped with the proposal. Why now, after all this time?”

“I’m sorry, Kurt. I’ve done a lot of thinking. I tried to figure out where I dropped the ball. Things went wrong with us after your dad’s coma. I should have listened to you. I shouldn’t have pushed what I believed on you. I was a bully. You just about lost your whole world and I was upset because you were challenging what I believed.”

“You and everyone else. It wasn’t just you. I learned that what I believed was less important than everyone else.”

“I am sorry about that, Kurt. I really am. A month later, I let myself believe that Blaine was good for you. I chalked up all my reservations about him to my own jealousy. I backed off and gave you space. You changed so much when you were at Dalton. You came back different. I thought it was just you growing up and us drifting apart. It was a lot of things. I’m not going to put the blame on you.”

“At Dalton, I learned to blend in. What the bullies had failed at, the conformity required there succeeded in.”

“I got caught up with Shane, and the whole West Side Story fiasco. I tried to distance myself from the whole situation, but you got shafted just as much as I did and you didn’t have a group to turn to. I didn’t realize until after Sectionals that you let Tina convinced you to give Mike all of those lines in ‘ABC’. By then it was too late to do anything about it. I got caught up with the Sam and Shane thing.”

“Yeah.”

“I haven’t a good friend to you in a long time. You never did anything to deserve that. I am sorry.
After graduation, I left for LA. I got caught up in my relationship with Sam again when I came to New York, but I should have realized then. You and Blaine can’t live together. He came to live with me and Sam.”

“We’ve never been able to live together. You’re right. We fought all the time. He has to be right about everything. He has a huge issue with any of his ideas being challenged. He pushed to get into second year classes, and then spent too much time hanging out with Sam, and whatever else he was doing, to do well. I chose my song idea for the Dance Hall dedication based on him singing with me. And even after I did that, he didn’t follow the plan. He lied to me about June Dolloway and spent a ton of time with her. He was doing poorly at mid-terms and then washed out of NYADA after our end-of-semester critiques. I was doing well and he wasn’t. He bit off more than he could chew. After everyone left at the end of May, he just couldn’t pull it together. It became unbearable with just the two of us in the loft by ourselves. I called off the wedding because all we were doing was fighting. He went back to Lima in early June.”

“Why did you want him back? You’ve broken it off with him twice and you went back to him. Kurt, he was just sleeping with Karofsky this past week. They lived together longer than just the two of you ever managed to pull off.”

“After reading that stuff, I don’t even know. I guess it’s because he’s what I know. It’s familiar. I feel lost without him around.”

“You had a gorgeous British man who really seemed to care for you and you went back to a high school boy. You said Adam was too perfect. He didn’t manipulate you or control you. That didn’t feel right to you. Kurt, honey, I think you need help. More help than I can offer.”

“Maybe. I went to therapy. The therapist said I had issues with intimacy. That I kept myself too closed off and didn’t let people close. She made me feel like everything that went wrong with Blaine was my fault. I still love him.”

“You may love him, I’m not arguing that point. But just because one therapist tells you something, doesn’t make it true. I’ve been around the two of you. That therapist hasn’t. He spent more time with Sam than he did with you. If someone had followed him around the city, I’m pretty sure that the person would have thought he was dating Sam and not you. My guess is that you went to therapy with the goal of trying to figure out how to get him back or make things work with him rather than trying to learn from your mistakes and move on.”

Kurt didn’t respond.

“Look, it’s only October. Maybe you could go back to New York and go back to the project that you had originally worked so hard on all summer. I know you put a ton of effort into writing that musical. And I know how much you loved working with Maggie and the others. You gave up your Dance Hall dedication solo spot to share the limelight with him and he stole that from you just like he took Tony. Kurt, I brought you here to give you time to think. I spent time talking to Sam last night and with what he told me and what you’ve just said, there’s a lot more to think about than I even realized. I’m going to stay here with you for at least another day. We’ll order room service, we’ll talk, you can think, and then you can make a decision.”

“A decision about what?”

“Whether you’re going to be the leading man in your own life story.”
Chapter 2

Blaine sat up in the dark and tried to look around before he realized that his eyes were open and that he just couldn’t see anything. He felt around and realized that he was sitting in a bed. A hotel. He must be in a hotel. His head was pounding.

Why was he alone in a bed in a hotel? Kurt must have gotten up and gone to the bathroom. He had no indications that they had sex. They must have gotten there and been too drunk and just fell asleep.

He ran his hands down his body. He was still wearing the tux pants and his undershirt, but not the rest of his tux. That must be it then. They had been too drunk and tired to do anything but sleep, but now Kurt was awake.

"Kurt?"

"Blaine?"

"Sam?"

"Yeah, dude. I’ve got some aspirin and water next to you. I’ll turn my phone on so you can see to pick them up." Sam picked his phone up of the bedside table between their beds and held it so that Blaine could see the bottle of water and the aspirin he had laid out. “Take them, so you’ll feel better.”

Blaine picked them up and swallowed them. "Why am I in a hotel room with you and where is Kurt?"

"Kurt’s fine. He’s with Mercedes. Not in this hotel though. They’re somewhere else. So, don’t leave the room to go find them.”

"Why are we in separate hotels with the two of you?"

"Because you both need to think.”

"Think?"

"Yeah. Go to the bathroom, wash your face, wake up a little, and we’ll talk.”

"What time is it?"

“A little before 7 in the morning.”

“Fine.” He did as Sam said and came back and propped the pillows up a bit and lay back, halfway between sitting and lying down. “So, explain.”

“I did a lot of thinking after I left New York last spring.”

“Okay?”

“And I found a good therapist. And after that I finally found something I enjoyed doing, although where I chose to do it was a bad choice because it put me back within Sue’s reach. But that’s not what this is about.”
“What IS this about?”

“You.”

“Me?”

“Yeah. There’s something about you that gives you this hold over the people around you. You have this way of making everything about you, even when you appear to be caring about other people. It’s almost to the point of creepiness. You charmed Kurt, Rachel, Finn, Burt, me, the Warblers, the teachers at NYADA, and it’s hard to explain how because I tried in therapy.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Okay. A couple of examples. I’ll start with Rachel. She was the diva of divas in school. She stomped off when she didn’t get her way. And her way ALWAYS included Finn. But one drunken kiss and she was willing to date you and ditch Finn. Even after you confirmed your 100% gayness, she was always Team Blaine. She accused Kurt of cheating on you with me in front of the whole group rather than just ask him what was going on in private. They had known each other for a year and a half, maybe longer. She had known you a couple of months. When you publicly humiliated Kurt over texting with Chandler for a few days, she sided with you, even though she knew that you had been texting with Sebastian up until the slushie incident. You told Sebastian our set list and she still sided with you on the supposed cheating. She was in New York when you tore Kurt’s heart out. She saw him fall apart and live on Ambien. But even when he had possibly found someone new, she supported you. Those things don’t make sense to me, except that maybe she still has a crush on you and since she can’t live out her own feelings with you, she thinks Kurt should. I don’t know.”

“She’s always been a good friend to me. I don’t see how that’s a problem.”

“The problem was that she was Kurt’s friend first, but she quit thinking about him once you were in the equation. But anyway, you charmed the Warblers into hosting the proposal. You and Kurt hadn’t even been back together for more than a full day and you planned a huge, over-the-top proposal. You somehow charmed the guys that we had gotten disqualified into hosting your huge proposal. How on earth did you do that? They should have hated you. We never had any proof that ALL of the Warblers did the steroids, but we accused them as a group.”

“They’re my friends.”

“No, they’re under some kind of spell. Obviously, in the end, it was Hunter and maybe a few others because when we went to Dalton, the vast majority of the Warblers were still there at the school. In a school with a zero-tolerance policy, obviously, those other Warblers tested negative for drugs or they wouldn’t have still been at Dalton.”

“Whatsoever. I didn’t DO anything to them to get them to agree.”

“I’m aware of that. I’m not saying that you did. Then, there are the teachers at NYADA. I know how hard Kurt and Rachel said classes were at NYADA, but somehow you managed to get yourself into nearly all of Kurt’s second-year classes. I don’t know how. You didn’t have the background or training to skip those first-year classes. Even as much of a self-assured diva as Rachel is, she had to slog through those first-year classes, but not you. How is that possible? Don’t answer.”

“I’m answering. I asked – I went in and talked to the instructors at the beginning of the semester. It doesn’t matter now. I won’t be going back to NYADA.”
“Then there was Burt, who was the biggest Kurt fan on the planet, yet somehow you pulled him to Team Blaine. You got him to take you to see Kurt when you knew Kurt wasn’t ready to see you that Christmas after you had cheated on him. You somehow got him to bring Kurt to that insane proposal at Dalton.”

“Kurt loved the proposal.”

“No, he didn’t.”

“I watched him. He was in awe.”

“He was in shock. Anyway, somehow you got Burt on Team Blaine. He freakin’ married the two of you yesterday and looked happy about it. Does he know that you were still having sex with Karofsky just a few days ago? Does he even know that you were dating Karofsky?”

“I don’t know what Kurt told him.”

“Well, I’m pretty damn sure that Burt wouldn’t be okay with you jumping out of Karofsky’s bed straight into Kurt’s. I heard what happened that day at Breadstix. Sue’s crazy and all, but I heard there were like 40+ guys there that Karofsky had been with. And those are just the ones that Sue could find. Have you been tested for STIs? I mean I seriously hope you never blew him without a condom or had unprotected sex with him without seeing a clean test that you saw handed to him straight from the clinic nurse. Kurt’s had sex with one person – you. You’ve slept with at least three guys, and from all accounts, two of them were with a LOT of other guys. Anyway, Burt looked way too happy to be marrying the two of you at the last minute to know that Karofsky had been boning you just a few days ago.”

Blaine didn’t say anything.

“But that’s how it was with the proposal the first time around. I mean you and I weren’t having sex, but that’s because I wasn’t willing, not because you weren’t interested. Be honest, if I had said that I had feelings for you when you told me about your crush on me, you would have kissed me and you would have slept with me. I’m pretty sure that if I got out of this bed right now and came over there and leaned in to kiss you, you’d close the gap and you’d let me go as far as I would be willing, including having sex with you.”

“I’m married to Kurt.”

“You were in an exclusive relationship with him when you flirted with Sebastian for months. You were in a committed, exclusive relationship when you had sex with whoever Eli C. was when you cheated on Kurt. Your ability to remain faithful is questionable.”

“I thought we were friends. Why are you saying these things?”

“Because it’s what I see. You want attention. Somehow you get it easily from everyone. Somehow you managed to get me to pay attention to you at the beginning of school last year. Kurt and I were friends, good friends. I hated you for what you had done to him. Somehow I managed to lose sight of that and became your best bro. At first, I was determined to keep your attention focused on stuff in Lima as much as possible, to keep you away from him. But after he left and Finn was gone, I guess I was so alone that I wasn’t thinking clearly. Tell me when you became interested in comic books and science fiction. You and I had zero in common. When I came back to McKinley from Kentucky, you came at me from the get go. I actually really disliked you and the feeling was mutual. I was Team Kurt and I don’t know how I ever let myself forget how you treated me. You never apologized, so it’s not that you made amends. Anyway, answer the question. From the day
we met through the entirety of our junior year, you never once gave any indication that you had any interest in superheroes, science fiction, or comic books.”

“I…”

“Here’s my take on it. You found me attractive. After Kurt broke up with you and he wasn’t having anything to do with you, you let yourself think about your attraction to me a bit more. When I suggested that you not run back to the Warblers, you took it as a personal invitation to stay. And you decided to give it a go with me as your new sidekick. And eventually your attraction got stronger. Tell me the truth. If I had said I was interested during our week of guilty pleasures, what would you have done?”

“Kissed you.”

“Thank you for being truthful. You were into me enough to be willing to make out with me, but at the same time, you were plotting to get Kurt back because you were pretty sure that I wasn’t interested. That’s all sorts of messed up.”

“I didn’t do anything with you.”

“Only because I wasn’t willing. Just hear me out, and then you’re going to have time to think. From everything I have seen, you want Kurt to be your 50’s wife who puts up with your wandering eye and need for extra-marital encounters.”

“What?”

“Why was he the only one to ever wear an engagement ring? Weren’t you engaged as well?”

“Men don’t wear engagement rings.”

“Bingo. Kurt’s the girl. But the problem is, dude, is that Kurt is a man too. Your huge, over-the-top proposal put him in the position of the girl. Putting a ‘hands off, he’s taken’ engagement ring on the person who has never cheated or had wandering eyes is, like, really weird. If anyone needed a reminder to stay faithful, it was you, not Kurt.”

“He dated Adam.”

“When the two of you were broken up.”

“He cheated on Adam with me. We both cheated on our partners.”

“Wrong. He and Adam had gone out on a few afternoon coffee dates. They were just getting to know each other. They weren’t serious. There was no talk of exclusivity since they weren’t even boyfriends. Kurt never cheated.”

“Whatever.”

“Dude, he told you they never got serious. He told me that. Handholding. Snuggling while watching movies. They dated, but never made it to the level of boyfriend. I told you Kurt never slept with him. I’m not sure they even kissed. He was hung up on you and Adam knew that. Kurt said Adam wanted more, but Kurt couldn’t give it to him. You dated Tina more seriously than Kurt dated Adam.”

“I didn’t date Tina.”
“You took her to a dance. You held hands with her. You slow danced with her. That was more of a date than drinking coffee in a coffee shop. You spent a lot of time together that whole semester.”

“I didn’t like Tina that way.”

“Kurt and Adam were friends. They spent time together. Adam wanted more. Kurt couldn’t give it to him. I already said this. Kurt did not cheat on Adam with you. If anything, you cheated on Tina. She was your date to the wedding and you slept with Kurt.”

“Whatever.”

“No, this is important. You feel justified. You feel like Kurt is at the same level as you. But it’s not true. Kurt is not a cheater. He hasn’t dated anyone seriously but you. He’s never had sex with anyone but you. You have this hold on him. Why do you want him? Why can’t you let him go and let him find someone who loves him for who he is?”

“He makes me the most important thing in his life. No one else does that.”

“No one should do that. You need help. I can’t give it to you. Mercedes wants you to read these websites. I’m going sit next to you while you do it. I’m supposed to text her once you’ve read them.”

“Why are you doing this?”

“Because I have come to my senses and so has Mercedes. We aren’t going to sit back and let Kurt’s life be destroyed again without at least attempting to intervene. I’m at fault for what I allowed to happen our senior year and in New York and this is my best effort at atoning for my mistakes. I took advantage of Kurt’s generosity and didn’t even know it. I didn’t even know that you weren’t giving him money until Mercedes told me that Kurt gave up the loft when Rachel’s dads told him that she wouldn’t be back. They had been paying for half of the loft rental that whole time. Kurt paid the other half. When we moved in, you said it would be fine. When we moved in with Mercedes, I thought you were paying for half of the rent there, but you weren’t. She just let us live with her. I paid for my groceries there because I had gotten that job modeling. I treated Kurt like dirt and I feel bad about it, but no more talking right now.” Sam handed Blaine his phone. “Read these so I can let Mercedes know that you read them.”
“You know what?” Mercedes said. “Let’s skip the room service for breakfast. According to this, they offer a free hot breakfast buffet. Let’s just go down there and eat whatever we want and we’ll order something or go out later. Don’t worry about how you look. Not a single person in this hotel knows you.”

“Fine, fine. Let’s go get something to eat.”

They went down to the breakfast area, ate their fill, and went back up to the room.

Once they were inside, Kurt said, “Do you mind if I go ahead and shower? Wait. Do I even have any clothes to wear?”

“You have what you were wearing when you left the wedding with me. The jacket you wore in the ceremony is hanging up over there. I don’t know if it’s a rental or not, but you go ahead and shower and just let me know when you’re on your way out and you can get back in the bed with just your underclothes on so your comfortable while we talk.”

“Yeah. I can do that I guess. If we’re not going back to Lima today, maybe we can at least grab some cheap sweats and underwear or something at some point today?”

“We’ll figure something out. Just go shower.”

While Kurt was in the shower, Mercedes phone pinged with a text from Sam that Blaine had read what Sam had asked him to. They texted back and forth for a while. She was more disturbed by what Sam sent than she had been before. She put her phone down and waited for Kurt.

“I’m coming out now.”

“Go ahead then. I’ve got my eyes closed.”

He climbed under the covers. “I’m covered now. I feel better after the shower.”

“Good. I had a shower last night after we got back. I had clothes with me though because I was planning on staying until my flight tomorrow afternoon.”

“So, in the shower I thought some more.”

“Do you want to talk about it or do you want to read what Sam had Blaine read?”

“Sam’s with Blaine?”

“Yeah. He approached me last night and we went outside for a while and had a serious talk. He’s really upset about the last-minute wedding. He’ll eventually talk to you because we’ll switch places. But no, he’s not in this hotel.”

“I guess I’ll read what Sam had Blaine read to maybe get a better understanding?”

“Sure.” She texted Kurt the links to the websites. She put her earbuds in and listened to some music.

After Kurt finished reading through everything, he got Mercedes attention.
“So, what did you think?”

“Well, as hard as it is to admit, I do see those things. I’d never really thought about gaslighting or what it would look like in a relationship, but after reading the explanation and the examples, I can think of plenty of times where I felt like I was going crazy because he would recall events differently than I had, but so many times people took his side over mine that I just got used to the feeling that my own viewpoint or recall of events was somehow inaccurate.”

“I get that. I really do.”

“He did things that annoyed me, but the people around me played them off like there was nothing to be annoyed about, so I always felt on edge and like my interpretation of his actions was wrong.”

“Earlier, you told me that he said that he gave you the excuse that ‘You weren’t there for him when he needed you.’ as a justification for cheating on you. What exactly did he mean? And when exactly did he cheat on you?”

“I told him to stop calling me at work because I could lose my job. And my job wasn’t just a set 9-5 or something. I had to work whenever I was scheduled, so sometimes that meant after traditional business hours or in addition to the daytime hours. And so sometimes that meant that he would call and think that I wasn’t at work, but I had to ignore his call if someone was around. Oh, and as for when, he came to New York the third weekend I was there. He was supposed to come visit two weekends after that, but he came two weeks early with a giant bouquet of red roses to surprise me, but by the end of the evening, I had squeezed his confession out of him.”

She sat and thought for a several minutes. She had a very intense look on her face. Her eyes flashed. Kurt could see her using her fingers to count it seemed like.

“I want you to try to step away from your own experience and think about two other people in a similar situation.”

“Okay.”

“Let’s talk about your dad and Carole.”

“What?”

“Shh. Listen. They had been exclusively dating and married for about 20 months when your dad got elected to Congress. You and Blaine had been dating exclusively for 18 months when you went to New York.”

“Okay.”

“When your dad first went to DC, was he gone for two weeks or more?”

“Yeah. The first time he went, he stayed for 3-4 weeks. He felt like there was so much he needed to know and learn quickly that he just stayed in DC for a while.”

“So, did Carole go out and find someone to have sex with while your dad was gone?”

“No. Of course not.”

“Why not?”

“She loves my dad and they were married.”
“But Blaine supposedly loved you and considered the two of you to be ‘soulmates’ or ‘endgame’ or whatever. Was your dad less busy than you were? Did he pay more attention to Carole than you paid to Blaine? Did Carole try to call Burt while he was in Congressional sessions?”

“Of course not.”

“Why not?”

“Because that would have been ridiculous. Congressional representatives don’t take non-emergency phone calls during sessions.”

“People at their place of work don’t take non-emergency phone calls. Your dad was at work. You were at work. Same thing. Your place of employment told you no personal calls. The fact that your dad’s job is ‘more important’ socially than yours was makes no difference whatsoever. You needed your job to pay your bills, which meant that keeping it was more critical to you than Burt keeping his position because Carole worked and he still had income coming in from his shop. Blaine getting upset because you wouldn’t take his calls during work time was ridiculous. Did your dad spend all of his non-work time calling Carole and talking to her?”

“Not that I’m aware of.”

“Would that have even made sense?”

“Not really. She has her life. He has his. They spend time together, but they do things apart as well.”

“Did you have a similar arrangement with Blaine? Did you have your life and he had his?”

That stumped Kurt. “Well, he had his life. But I had a job. He did whatever he did while I was at work. I had schoolwork to do and stuff like laundry and chores to do. When I was first in New York, those first two weeks, I obviously didn’t have schoolwork to do, but the loft was nothing but a giant open space. I had to get the place livable, mostly on my own because you know that Rachel doesn’t really do that kind of thing. Plus, she had schoolwork already.”

“So, you didn’t really have any free time those first few weeks.”

“None. I worked all day and a few evenings. I worked on the loft when I wasn’t at work. I used the money from selling my Navigator to pay for my half of the cost of buying appliances and the furniture we shared. I bought my own bedroom stuff.”

“So, did you still talk to Blaine during that time period?”

“I did. We Skyped. We watched some shows together by watching them at the same time we Skyped. I called him. I took his calls, even at work if I could get away with it, but I cut them short. I’m sure it seemed like I was hanging up on him all the time, but I couldn’t get caught.”

“What did he want to talk to you about?”

“God, that was forever ago. Let me think. I remember him showing me several bow ties and asking me which one he should wear for the class president debate.”

Mercedes laughed. “His bow ties have always been ridiculous. That’s not exactly a deep conversation. Did he tell you that he was lonely or that he missed you?”

“Yes. But never to the extent that I got the impression that he would cheat on me. It was two
weeks.”

“His hands weren’t in casts. He had a solution to his ‘problem’ if that was his deal.”

Kurt couldn’t help but laugh.

“Or there are other toys, if he needed something else.”

“Mmm hmm.”

“Back to your dad and Carole. I’m sure that Carole missed your dad. Just like I’m sure your dad missed her. But neither one of them cheated because of missing each other. That statement of him needing you but you weren’t there was really manipulative. It was punishing you for something he told you to do. You told me that you were going to stay in Lima until December and go to New York in January if you got in when you reauditioned. And then, maybe a month after that when we talked, you said that he told you to go ahead and go. Talk about mixed messages. Passive/aggressive much? Go, but since you left and you’re not here, I’ll cheat on you?”

“I don’t know. Honestly, he would never talk about it. Like at all. Every time I tried to figure out what actually happened, he’d just shut me down and tell me that he had already apologized and that it was in the past. I don’t even know who Eli C. was. From all I can gather, he was just some random from Facebook.”

“You still haven’t really said the answer I was hoping for about why Carole didn’t cheat on your dad.”

“Then just tell me.”

“Because mature people in an exclusive relationship don’t cheat on each other after two weeks. No mature person feels THAT abandoned in two weeks. He was running for class president. He had that to keep him busy. People cheat for different reasons, but in his case it seems like he did it in retaliation. You didn’t do what he wanted, which was continue to act like he was the center of your world, so he did something to bring him back to his rightful position in your life. How did he act afterward?”

“To be honest, when we got back to the loft, he got ready for bed, and he got in bed with me. He didn’t even have the decency to offer to sleep on the couch. I woke up early the next morning and waited to talk to him. Finn came out and hugged me and left. I waited for Blaine for ages. I eventually got in the shower. When I got out, he was gone.”

“So, he was obviously awake and waiting for a way to escape?”

“Seems so, but then Finn told me that Blaine said that I wouldn’t talk to him. Another one of those times I was talking about. I waited, he snuck off, but then supposedly I wouldn’t talk to him, and Finn believed him. I didn’t even bother to argue the fact that Finn knew I was waiting to talk to Blaine. I just let it go.”

“Look, honey, I think you need some more time to think. I’m going to go out and get you some clothes to wear and some food for later. Look through those websites some more. I’ll leave my charging cable here so you can charge your phone. Any requests?”

“Umm. Boxer briefs, medium in dark colors. Black sweatpants, medium, as slim cut as possible. Black or gray tanks, large – because those things shrink something terrible when you dry them. I guess a couple of pairs of decent looking black dress socks so I can use them again later. I can’t wear athletic socks in my dress shoes, which is all I have with me. And some deodorant. I can get
by with the hotel-provided stuff, but there’s no deodorant in there. You know what kind I like. I haven’t switched brands. Oh, and a toothbrush.”

She put what he said in her phone. “Got it.”

“Thanks. I read more while you’re gone.”
“I’m going to go shower. I’ll be back in a few minutes.” Sam got up, went to the bathroom and took a shower. He redressed in the same underclothes he had on when he went in, but he had slipped his dress pants back on. Blaine was still sitting in the same spot when he came back. Sam sat back down on his own bed, leaned against the headboard.

“Let’s go down and get some breakfast before they close the breakfast bar.”

“Dressed like this?”

“Yeah, sure. No one you know is here in this hotel and your clothes are covering all of your body parts. You’re fine. I’m dressed the same as you. I’m hungry. Let’s go.”

They went down, ate some bagels and cream cheese, drank some coffee and took a carton of juice and a muffin and some fruit back upstairs with them.

Once they were back in the room, Blaine asked, “Am I going to see Kurt?” He sat on the edge of the bed he had slept in.

“Not today.”

He flopped back dramatically. “This is kidnapping.”

“Not really. You’re free to leave. You’ll have to call a cab to take you back to where we parked your car though. We are going out later though – to get some supplies. I figured you need a toothbrush and maybe some other clothes?”

“Yeah. How long are we staying?”

“Just until tomorrow.”

“Alright.”

“So, back to the stuff we were talking about. What did reading those articles make you think about?”

“I don’t really see how any of them fit me. I’m not mean or controlling. I’ve never threatened him or anyone else. I’m not abusive.”

“A couple of weeks ago, I talked to him about why he had broken up with you again. He told me that a few days before he called it off, you had argued for three hours about a towel. In three hours, you could have washed and dried the towel three or four times at a laundromat and been back to the loft.”

“He didn’t care that I hate having toothpaste on a shared towel. I had asked him several times to stop doing it.”

“Why didn’t you just go to the dollar store and buy a week’s worth of hand towels just for him? Seven bucks seems like a cheap solution to the issue if it was such a serious problem for you. Why did he have to change his vision of the purpose of a hand towel to match yours? It’s just a stupid piece of cloth.”

“It’s the principal of it. I asked him to stop and he didn’t take my perspective into consideration.”
Sam rolled his eyes and moved on. “You were pushing him for a summer wedding. He wanted to graduate from college before he got married.”

“He was going to get financial aid with us married.”

“You could have gotten a job to help with the expenses.”

“I need to focus on my schoolwork.”

“You horsed around with me all the time. You always had time to hang out or go out. Were you not doing what you needed to do to make good grades?”

“I thought I was.”

“So while Kurt working his ass off to cover half of the rent and make good grades, you were horsing around me too much to do well?”

“My mid-term grades were weak, but I thought I had done well enough to pull them up, and when I checked my semester grade report after finals, I thought everything was fine. But unlike a lot of schools NYADA has an end-of-year evaluation that each student has to pass to move on to the next year. I got that back a week after finals. I washed out. I didn’t pass the evaluation.”

“And Kurt?”

“He had rave reviews on his.”

“I see. I’m sure that didn’t help things between the two of you.”

“I didn’t tell him that I didn’t pass at first. I appealed, but I lost the appeal.”

“It’s a tough school, dude. You knew that.”

“Yeah. I turned all of my time toward working on the wedding. But that just upset him.”

“He told you he wanted to wait. You didn’t listen. Not being listened to upsets people, especially when the person not listening is supposed to be the person who loves you the most. And whether you want to admit it or not, you just trudge forward with your ideas when people tell you no.”

“That was a misunderstanding. I was drunk.”

“What are you talking about?”

“What are you talking about?” Blaine countered. “Never mind. It’s not important. Continue with whatever it is you have to say to me.”

“All I’m saying is that you two didn’t last a month living together in the loft. You kept telling me that things didn’t work when you were still living with him after I moved out because it still wasn’t just the two of you. When you moved back in after we all left, the two of you had all of the time that he wasn’t at school or work or doing schoolwork to spend together and you wasted three of those hours arguing over a stupid piece of cloth that you could have replaced for $1.”

Blaine didn’t respond.

“You weren’t back very long before you started seeing Karofsky. How did that even start? You never would tell me.”
“We were both at Scandals, drinking obviously. We both had had too much. We ended up doing what a lot of guys do in gay bars.”

“So, you hooked up with him in the Scandals bathroom?”

“Yeah, and then we fooled around in my backseat for a while. Once we were sober enough to drive, I went to his place and we fooled around some more.”

“Define ‘fooled around’.”


“And then you started dating after that?”

Blaine didn’t respond.

“So, he became your what? Fuck buddy? Because you would have had to actually be friends to be friends-with-benefits.”

“Yeah. Over time, we sort of moved from … that … into dating because we spent more time together. I was over at his place most of the time. He was living in an efficiency. After I started spending more time there, he suggested that we find a place together when his lease was up at the end of the summer. We found a place in Marysville. He was working south of Lima and going to school in Lima and it was more feasible with me driving to Dalton so frequently.”

“So you two basically lived together most of the summer, but just at his old place?”

“Yeah, I guess so. I didn’t like just sitting around my parents’ place.”

“Do they know you flunked out or whatever?”

“No. I spent that night in a motel and went back to the loft the next day when he was at work and boxed everything up and mailed the boxes to my parents’ place the day after Kurt broke up with me. I had told them that I might be staying with friends in New York for the summer, but when everything fell apart, I came back and told them I had run out of people to stay with.”

“So, what do they think you’re doing working at Dalton?”

“A work-study thing like Kurt. They weren’t thrilled with my grades, but I didn’t tell them about washing out.”

“I see.”

Blaine went back to the first thing Sam had brought up. “Earlier you said you think I have some kind of voodoo powers to get people to like me and then I control them with my mind-bending powers of persuasion.”

Sam took a deep breath and tried to relax and focus both. “Do you have any ability to self-reflect?”

“On what?”

“Your actions.”

Blaine sat back up and moved to the head of the bed and put the pillows up so he could lean on them. “I’m not sure what actions you are referring to.”
“Well, we were talking about you and Karofsky. Did you at any point love him?”

“No.”

“So, for clarity, you moved on from blow jobs?”

“Yeah.”

“So, you had sex with him, then dated him, then mostly lived with him, then actually moved in with him, and lived like a couple.”

“Yeah.”

“You pseudo-lived with him for a few months, then actually moved in with him over two months ago. So, for 4-5 months in total.”

“Right.”

“You never managed to live with Kurt for anywhere near that length of time and you supposedly love him enough to marry him yesterday, despite the fact that you and Karofsky were still having sex a few days ago.”

“Enough with the sex talk.”

“Have you had sex with Kurt since you broke up with Karofsky?”

“No.”

“Well, thank God for that.”

“That’s rude.”

“There’s no way you’ve had time to have an STI test since you quit having sex with Karofsky.”

“Why do you keep bringing that up?”

“Because I am grossed out, dude. You never said ‘Yeah, he always wore a condom when I blew him.’ There’s no way that Sue found even half the guys that Karofsky had been with. Those had to have been the ones that she could find that hang out at Scandals. From what I heard, they were all like ‘Hey, Dave!’ – all friendly like they were buddies that Dave was pals with. He’s been out for like 2½ years. You can’t seriously think he’s limited himself to the pickings at Scandals if he enjoys the sex-in-public-places lifestyle. Those were more than likely his repeat weeknight hook-ups. Guys he hangs out there with, you know his ‘friends-with-benefits group’. People Sue could find easily. I’d wager money I don’t have that he went to swankier places on Friday and Saturday nights. Columbus? Toledo? I’m not slut shaming anyone – not at all. But I am completely grossed out by the thought of you blowing him without a condom. Remember Miss Holiday and her ‘everyone’s been with a random’? Maybe you weren’t there. Anyway, you were with a random. Have you slept with other guys besides Kurt, your random, and Karofsky?”

“Why does it matter? I get your point. I’ll go to a clinic when you let me go back to Ohio.”

“It matters because I want to know if you cheated on Kurt more than once.”

“We’re married now. What difference does it make?”

“The fact that you won’t answer seems to be an answer itself, doesn’t it?”
“He already married me.”

“Do you love him?”

“Yes.”

“What has changed in the last 6 months to make you think that you can be more successful living together than you were the first two times you tried?”

“He’s in Lima with the New Directions. He’s not in New York being pulled in 20 directions by NYADA, his job, schoolwork, other friends, classes…”

“He doesn’t have any friends in New York to my knowledge. You made him so miserable about having any friends of his own, he gave them up all to keep the peace.”

“They were taking up too much of his time, taking him away from me.”

“You are so full of yourself. You spent time with me and other people when we were in New York.”

“That was different.”

“Different how?”

“It just was. Kurt was wasting his time with that stupid band of his. He’s never going to make it as a recording artist.”

“And you will?”

“Maybe. June Dolloway was willing to back me. Now, that I’m back with Kurt, I’ll have to find someone else willing to back me. She hated Kurt. But if she was willing to back me, there will be other people as well.”

“She was just looking for someone to make her look good. She never got you any solo spots. She got you to sing along with her and give her the opportunity to shine while showing you off. She fed your ego. You liked the fact that she preferred you to Kurt.”

Sam’s phone buzzed. He picked it up and looked at it. “Time to go.”

Blaine got up and put the tux shirt back on and tucked it in. He grabbed his shoes and put them on. He went in the bathroom and wet his hands and did what he could with his hair.

“Don’t worry about it. We’re in a place where no one knows you and we’re going to, like, Wal-Mart or Target or something. We just need to grab a few things. So, have some idea what you need for the next few days or whatever.”

“You’re letting us leave tomorrow, right?”

“Yeah. We’re not actually kidnapping you. I’m taking you out in public. I mean if you really want to leave, you can. But if you wait until tomorrow, I’ll take you to your car, and then you can drive your own car back to Ohio.”

“Fine. Let’s go.”
Kurt reread each website that Mercedes and Sam had found for him to read. Then he looked up the keywords from the websites and read a few other websites. He switched to YouTube and found a couple of TEDx Talks and then that led him to some mental health videos posted by psychiatrists and psychologists from legitimate mental health facilities.

Kurt noticed the time. Mercedes had been gone for nearly three hours. He had managed to slog through quite a bit of material. Words floated through his thoughts – narcissism, borderline personality disorder, sociopath, gaslighting, manipulation, emotional abuse. Was he a victim? Was Blaine an abuser? Was he mentally ill? What did all of it mean for the two of them?

He focused back to when he was sitting in the dark earlier that morning when Mercedes asked him to explain what he meant about how Adam was too perfect and how him being gentle felt wrong. He closed his eyes and tried to sort through his feelings as snippets of conversations and bits of scenes replayed in his mind like a movie that was familiar, but he was trying to analyze more objectively.

“We all wear blazers for a reason.”

A flash of Blaine indicating for him to put his hand down when he sang played in his mind, followed my numerous flashes of Blaine jumping on furniture and that awful stalking serenade at the GAP.

“This is for everyone who’s be cheated on.”

Months of Blaine texting with Sebastian while he dealt with insults came to the forefront of his thoughts. And then the sight of Blaine crying as he sang at Callbacks popped into his mind.

“Your Winter Showcase performance was … breathtaking.”

He remembered the very short completely Blaine-free time in New York after he had started at NYADA. The seemingly endless compliments that Adam paid him. The sincerity with which he spoke them caused tears to form in Kurt’s eyes. Adam had loved him – all of him. He hadn’t been able to accept it. He kept waiting for what felt like flattery to end and the criticism to start, but it never did. He had left Adam in New York wanting Kurt to be his completely and he went back to Lima into the arms of the boy who was barely a man who swore he would never cheat on him again, but was that a real reason to take him back? He already had someone who loved him that he was sure wouldn’t cheat on him, but he couldn’t break free from Blaine’s hold on him.

And now? Why on earth had he agreed to marry Blaine when he had just moved out after living with Dave for months? Obviously, he and Dave had no trouble getting along well enough to live together. Dave seemed happy with him. He walked straight out of a serious relationship with Dave and straight down the aisle with Kurt.

“I’ll never forgive you for this.” started feeling like a challenge that seemed to mean “Do something to make me forgive you. Earn my forgiveness.” Had he fallen right back into a narcissist’s lair, pushing the focus back on Blaine? Obviously Blaine’s statement hadn’t been true. He was all too happy to take Kurt back after Kurt had been publicly humiliated and forced to deal with Dave as Blaine’s boyfriend.

Was there more to Blaine’s choice of partner? After reading everything, it made him wonder if
Blaine chose Dave because it proved that the only other guy Blaine knew that had potentially liked Kurt preferred Blaine in the end. And making everyone see that even cantankerous Karofsky was capable of living harmoniously with Blaine pointed to Kurt being the one that was too difficult to live with.

It was all too confusing. First he had to figure out whether he actually wanted to be married to Blaine. It wasn’t a done deal, just like Mercedes had said. They had to go to a courthouse and get a license and have a civil ceremony performed after they had the license for them to be legally married.

Just then, there was a slight knock on the door, followed by the sound of the electronic keycard being inserted. He looked up expecting Mercedes to come in only to find it was Sam carrying a few bags.

“Hey, Sam.”

“Hey. I have all of the stuff you ask for.” He put the bags on the dresser. “And food.”

“Thanks. Can you step in the bathroom and shut the door for a few minutes?”

“Yeah. Sure. Just knock when I can come out.” Sam took a bag with him into the bathroom.

Kurt got up and looked through the two bags and found the deodorant at the bottom of the first bag he looked in and put some on before he opened the packages of underwear and tanks. He got all the tape and cardboard off. He took the tags off the sweats, and then tossed all of the trash into the wastebasket. He switched to clean underwear, slipped on one of the tanks, and put the sweats on. He folded up the clothes he had been wearing and put them in the empty Target bag. He looked in the second bag and found a gray hoodie. He slipped it on and it fit, so he took the tag of it as well. He folded up the other two extra pairs of underwear and tanks and put them in the other bag. He walked over the bathroom and knocked. Sam opened the door and came out. He had changed into a pair of jeans and a hoodie. Kurt stepped inside holding the deodorant and the toothbrush.

“I’ll brush my teeth and be right out. Thanks for the addition of the hoodie to my requests. I didn’t think about how I hadn’t brought a jacket with me since I was wearing the suit when we left Lima. I love the swirl and the black on gray effect and it’s the perfect time of year for it.”

Sam nodded and smiled. “Target has their Halloween costumes and clothing out. That’s always the best time to find something fun like a *Nightmare Before Christmas* hoodie.” He stood outside the door while Kurt brushed his teeth.

“Well, I really like it. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. It looks good on you.”

“I like your Storm Trooper hoodie. It looks like someone die-cut a Jackson Pollack painting in the shape of a storm trooper helmet.”

Sam laughed. “That is exactly what I thought when I saw it.”

When Kurt came out of the bathroom, he walked back to the bed he had been sleeping in and pulled the covers up neatly and fluffed the pillow. He sat down on the side of the bed.

“There were no socks in my bags. Are they in another bag?”

“Oh, yeah. Sorry about that. I bought you something else.” He leaned over near the dresser and

...
picked up a brown paper shopping bag with handles that Kurt hadn’t seen when he came in the door. “I picked up a pair of Chucks for you and me too. We stopped by Shoe Carnival. I got you dark gray because I thought they’d go with everything pretty much.”

“Thanks,” Kurt said as he took the box Sam handed him.

“I got myself these bright blue ones because I loved the color and I don’t really care if they match.” He opened the box to show Kurt. He sat down on the other bed facing Kurt.

Kurt laughed. “Wear what you like.”

Sam held two packs of socks for Kurt to choose between. He took the light gray 3-pack and opened it and put a pair on and slipped his feet in the shoes. Sam opened the white 3-pack and put a pair on and started relacing the pair of Chucks he had bought for himself.

“Perfect,” Kurt said. He slipped them off and relaced them completely. “They’re great. Thanks. Just let me know how much I owe you for everything.”

“Oh, Mercedes bought the stuff from your list. The hoodie and the socks and shoes are a gift. No need to repay me. You can take up the cost of the other stuff with Mercedes.”

“Thanks. It was really thoughtful. And I know you had a hand in picking out the other stuff because they’re the type I like.”

“Living with someone for … 14 or 15 months gives a person insight to those kinds of things.”

Kurt put the shoes next to the dresser on the floor. He picked up the Taco Bell bag and the drink and walked back over to the bed and sat down. He put the drink on the bedside table. He slid up, sat back against the pillow, pulled out a taco and started eating. Sam had moved and was standing near the window staring outside.

“You can sit wherever.”

Sam made the bold move of walking up to the other side of the bed where Kurt was sitting and put the other pillow against the headboard. He slipped his new shoes off and sat down next to Kurt.

“Kurt, I’m so sorry.”

Kurt looked puzzled.

“Somewhere between starting my senior year for the second time and that staircase at Dalton, I completely lost my mind. I’ve been to counseling and despite my best efforts to figure out exactly how it happened, I haven’t been successful at pinpointing when I went over to the dark side.”

Kurt laughed at his Star Wars reference. “I’ve missed you, Sam.”

“I think I’m just one of the many casualties of the Blaine-effect.”

“The Blaine-effect?”

“I’ve never seen it before. I had to give the phenomenon its own name. And like unlike most people who make a discovery, I don’t want it named after me because I don’t want to be associated with it anymore. My therapist says that Blaine is most likely a narcissist, but she can’t officially diagnose someone that she hasn’t met. So, I just call it the Blaine-effect.”

Kurt listened and gave Sam time to collect his thoughts.
“From the moment anyone meets him, he manages to get that person to turn their focus on him. He’s like this magnetic force. He pulls people in and the closer they get, the less they can see the real Blaine, but they can’t pull their focus away.”

“Interesting analogy.”

“I’ve heard the stories about him singing flirty duets with you, and leading you on by taking you out on coffee dates. Then he serenaded the GAP guy. You couldn’t let him go three months after you had met him and he had been an absolute ass to you. And now, nearly four years later, his hold on you is nearly complete. Where’s the real Kurt? The one that approached me to sing with him, and then when you were bullied into backing out got up and belted out the most amazing solo duet with all the bluster and bravado and uniqueness that is Kurt?”

“I don’t know.”

“Me neither. I only saw him briefly right before I left New York. He was flying on wires singing a Madonna song that he worked into a Peter Pan musical. So I know he’s still alive in there somewhere.”

“You make it sound like I have multiple personalities.”

“Nope. You’ve just let Blaine succeed where no bully ever did. You’ve let him take away your individuality and your confidence. You actually believe the chorus of that that song you sang the day he falsely accused you of cheating on him, except you’re living a twisted version of the song. Sing it.”

“Right now?”

“Yes.”

*Share my life*
*Take me for what I am*
*‘Cause I’ll never change*
*All my colors for you*

Sam interrupted. “Stop there.”

Kurt stopped singing.

The whole song goes back and forth. It’s sort of a weird song. She goes on about how she won’t change, how she won’t hold back her passion, how she can’t run from her true self and hide it away for someone, but yet she says she’s nothing without him. To me, it means that he’s the one that gives her the strength to be herself to have the ability to be strong and how she wants to share her life with this person who gives her so much strength. But you sang the song and overlooked all of the verses about remaining true to yourself and focused on repeating how you were nothing without Blaine. He falsely accused you of cheating on him in front of everyone you considered to be a friend or at least friendly. I saw those texts. You sat next to me showing them to me. Back when we were friends. Those weren’t cheating texts – they were cheesy texts.”

“I’ve never cheated on him.”

“I know that. But you stood in front of the group and accepted his accusation. You didn’t fight back. You all but admitted that you had. I saw you in Miss Pillsbury’s office. I eavesdropped. When you asked about things he wanted to work on in your relationship, he said you snapped at waiters. While that may be rude, it had nothing to do with your relationship or his messed up idea
about you being a cheater. He said he’d been avoiding your scheduled make-out sessions so he could practice what it would feel like when you were in New York? I thought I must have heard that part wrong. But even when you tried to get an adult to help you work through your issues, he didn’t cooperate way back then.”

“You didn’t mishear. He scheduled our make-out sessions. At some point it just got easier to drink the Kool-Aid.”

“The Blaine-effect.”

“I read more while Mercedes was out with you. I listened to a psychiatrist explain the difference between a few of the labels.”

“I’m not sure that it makes a difference in regards to your choice of heading to a county clerk’s office tomorrow morning and making the marriage legal.”

“Probably not, but I agree on the narcissist label. From the pages I read that highlighted the differences, his behavior fell to the narcissist side. What made you realize these things?”

“Getting away from Blaine.”
Mercedes was waiting in the loading zone in front of the hotel when the got downstairs. Sam got in his truck and slid to the center. Blaine sat next to him. Mercedes had already gotten directions and drove out of the lot. About 20 minutes later, they pulled into Target parking lot. Sam handed Blaine his debit card from his wallet.

“I don’t get my wallet back?”

“Not yet. It’s in the hotel room with your phone and keys.”

“What if they ask for my ID?”

“It’s a Target, dude. Go through the self-checkout. Don’t try to buy alcohol. You’ll be fine.”

“This is annoying, but I want something else to wear, so let’s get going.”

“Alright,” Mercedes said. “Go get whatever you want or need and we’ll meet up in 30 minutes in the Starbucks.” As they stepped inside, she revised her statement. “Make that 45 minutes in the Starbucks. There are a lot of people in here.”

Blaine didn’t have his phone because Sam still had it with him, so there wasn’t much he could do about complaining to someone about what was going on. He didn’t want to get the police involved. No one was being hurt. And on some level, he could understand Mercedes enlisting Sam to try to break him and Kurt up. She had never liked him as much as the others, but he didn’t force Kurt to marry him and he hoped that they would see that Kurt loved him and wanted to be with him and then they’d drop the whole thing and be supportive. It had been sprung on everyone at the last minute, so he knew there would be at least a few people who were leery about the whole thing.

He grabbed a cart and walked around the store. He started in the men’s clothing. He looked for Levi’s, but found Denizen by Levi’s. Close enough. He took a couple of pairs into the dressing room and found a pair that fit. He put them in the cart. He looked through the men’s department and bought a 3-pack of underwear and socks and two plaid button-down shirts from the clearance rack. He looked around and found a decent looking red cardigan and put it in the cart too. From there he hit the personal care products and bought what he needed. He meandered through the snacks and picked up a few things. He checked out, ordered a coffee, and sat and waited for the other two to finish.

Sam went the opposite way that Blaine had gone. He hit the food area first. He grabbed things that he knew that Kurt liked. Once he had finished, he grabbed a toothbrush, toothpaste, and deodorant for himself and for Kurt, and then he met Mercedes in the men’s department.

Sam chose the underwear and tanks based on what he knew of Kurt’s preferences from having lived with him. He grabbed a pack of underwear for himself as well. He found some slim-fit sweats and put them in the cart. The Halloween area caught his eye and he went to look.

“Won’t he need something warmer to wear than just a tank? I’m going to get him a hoodie.”

Mercedes nodded. “That’s fine. I’ll be back in a minute. I’m going to go grab his deodorant and a toothbrush.”

“I already grabbed what he likes and the brand of toothpaste he likes.”
Sam grabbed a hoodie for Kurt and one for himself and chose a pair of jeans. He tossed them in the cart.

“We need some shoes. I’ll be right back.” He came back just a couple of minutes later. “They don’t sell men’s Converse anymore.” He pulled his phone out. “Let’s stop at Shoe Carnival. Sometimes they have buy one, get one half-price shoes and socks.”

“Fine. I’m not sure what Kurt even brought with him that’s at his house. I don’t think he came actually expecting to stay from what Rachel said. He switched everything up after he got here. So, I doubt he brought many casual shoes or clothes with him.”

They headed up front and paid for everything. They found Blaine waiting in Starbuck’s.

“Ready?”

“I am.”

“We’ve got another stop. And we can grab some lunch if you want.”

“Sounds good.”

They stopped at Shoe Carnival. Sam searched until found what he was looking for. He grabbed two packs of socks near the register. Blaine was sitting in the women’s section where Mercedes was looking around.

“You don’t want any other shoes to wear?” Sam asked after he had been through the line.

“These are fine. The clothes I picked out will look fine with them. I have plenty of shoes I can pick up tomorrow.”

“Alright then, let’s grab some lunch,” Sam said.

Mercedes drove to Taco Bell before heading back. Sam and Blaine ate on the way.

Mercedes pulled up to the hotel Blaine was staying at and Blaine grabbed his bags and got out. Mercedes got out as well. She brought her food, but left her bags in the seat when she got out. Sam slid over into the driver’s seat.

“Give Sam your debit card back.”

Blaine thought about refusing, but he really want this whole nightmare to end as soon a possible, so he went along with the request and pulled his debit card out of his back pocket and handed it to Sam.

Sam nodded. Blaine walked toward the hotel lobby entrance.

Mercedes stepped up to the window. Sam rolled it down. He and Mercedes traded hotel key cards, and Sam slipped Blaine’s driver’s license into her hand at the same time. She nodded. She walked up behind Blaine.

“So, let’s get back up to your room and eat. I’m hungry.”

Once the two of them were inside, Sam drove off.

They walked up to the second floor and Mercedes led the way and opened the room up.
“I know you’ll want to shower. Go ahead. I’ll sit out here and eat.”

“Um, sure. Just give me a few minutes.” He went in the bathroom and showered. He put on the jeans, socks, and one of the button-ups with the cardigan over the shirt. He shaved, brushed his teeth, fixed his hair, and came back out.

He put a bag with folded clothes in it on the dresser. He pulled out a bag of cheeseballs and sat on the bed that he had slept in. “Thanks for giving me time to shower. I feel much more human now.”

“I figured. I know the two of you didn’t pack to stay the weekend, whereas I had, since I flew in. I had a nice hot shower last night before I went to sleep. Kurt felt a lot better after his shower this morning. I’m sure he’ll feel more relaxed once Sam gets there with some clothes for him to wear. He’s been lying in the bed covered up since his shower.”

Blaine laughed. “I bet he hated that.”

“Well, it was better than lounging around in the tux pants he had slept in.”

“True.”

“Obviously Sam didn’t have anything to wear either, so now all three of you will more comfortable. Where’s your ring?”

“Oh, I slipped it in my jeans pocket. I’m not big into jewelry and I’ve never really worn rings. It felt weird. So, what do you want to talk about?”

“Nothing specific. Sam wanted time to talk to Kurt.”

“Why did you have Sam make me read those websites?”

She ignored the question she really wanted to ask and let Blaine change the subject. “I just found it odd that Kurt was willing to marry you when you just broke up with Dave a few days ago. You know I was the first person he came out to. The first person he trusted with knowing something so personal about him. I love him and I just didn’t want to find out that somehow this was forced on him.”

“Oh. Well, I didn’t force him. It was Britt’s idea. Sue pulled us into a room at the barn and Brittany had the two black tux jackets and ties and said that we had inspired her and Santana back in high school and that she wanted us to get married with them.”

“I still think that’s weird and I’ve known Brittany for over 6 years. And trust me, I’ve heard some really weird things come out of her mouth. One time she told us all she was going to have a baby and then proceeded to tell us that she found out that morning because a stork was building a nest that she could see from her bedroom window.”

Blaine laughed.

“Yeah. I know. Why did you do it, though? Why not wait and have your own wedding? I mean Kurt’s been planning weddings since he was like four or something.”

“I think it was just too much stress. He had school and work. He pushes himself really hard to be perfect at everything. I know he wanted to get married, but he just kept pushing the details to me to figure out, so it seemed like he was just too busy to focus on it.”

“Maybe he just wasn’t ready.”
“I guess that’s possible. But he came back for me, so in the end he didn’t really want to call it off. I think he just needed to be back here with his friends. I think NYADA might not be the best place for him. It’s just so competitive. He might enjoy a more low-key school.”

“I guess that’s possible, but he’s always held himself to high standards. It’s just part of who he is.”

“I suppose so. He does get stuck in his ways though. He needs to relax. Maybe being back here allowed him to do that.”

“Why don’t you tell me about your plans for you and Kurt?”
“Being away from him hasn’t helped me much. I went to a therapist too. I was told that men fight as a way to stay connected. The therapist told me that I had issues with intimacy, but she seemed to imply that Blaine didn’t. Now that I read that other stuff, I wonder if I just somehow presented everything about Blaine in a way that made him seem like the perfect guy and I was the one who kept messing everything up. I would leave the sessions feeling worse than when I went in. I’m not claiming that I’m a saint and that I never did things that annoyed him, and maybe I do have issues with intimacy, but after all that reading, I think it’s because I constantly lived with the passive/aggressive behavior that wasn’t predictable. I didn’t know whether doing something that upset him would cause him to ignore me for the rest of the day or maybe more than a day until broke down and apologized for whatever I had done even if it had been an accident or something I didn’t realize bothered him. Or maybe I would get a three-hour fight about a towel when I did the wrong thing. It’s hard to know.”

Sam just listened and let Kurt process his thoughts.

“He showed up late to everything we scheduled. I’d plan meticulously to arrive on time for whatever it was and he was always late. The night I broke it off with him, he was late again. He sat down and told me that he’d been to this venue he had been looking at and that Labor Day was available for our wedding. I was sarcastic and asked why I was always the first one to arrive and instead of apologizing, he just repeated himself about where he’d been. If he wanted to go there before we met, he should have left earlier or texted me letting me know that he had to make another stop and that he’d be late. But instead, I was left sitting in a nice restaurant at an outdoor table under an awning while it poured down rain by myself while the waitress came back several times asking if I was ready to order, and I kept having to tell her that the other person in my party was on his way.”

Kurt stared off into space, as if he were watching the scene replay in his mind.

“He got really emotional, asking me what had changed and if he had done something. He said he knew we could fix whatever was wrong. But all I heard was ‘You’re being ridiculous about me being late again.’ And I felt like he was baiting me into another argument – that if I said something sincere about something we needed to work on that he would just turn it on me and it would be something else that I needed to work on. He cried when I told him that I wanted to call it off before we hated each other. Then he suddenly became very stoic and said, ‘I will never forgive you for this.’ Maybe the therapist was right about me using arguments to stay connected. I probably did some of the time. When he would ignore me waiting for an apology instead of telling me directly what I had done to upset him, sometimes I would intentionally do something to upset him just to get him to talk because oftentimes once I got him aggravated, he would say what he was originally upset about and I could apologize for both issues rather than trying to go through everything I had done to figure out what he was upset about.”

“Wow. Honestly, I don’t even know where to start with all of that. I can say that it fits with what my therapist told me. A narcissist will charm everyone around them, but the person whose attention they want most is the one that they manipulate. So, Rachel, your dad, me, Tina, the Warblers somehow, Santana, and Mercedes, and even Sue all got to see the amazing charismatic side of Blaine. He didn’t let anyone else see his manipulative side because that would have given you allies.”

“You weren’t there, but Santana tore into me after she proposed to Brittany and I spoke up against
getting married so young. She was 100% Team Blaine. Rachel just stood there while Santana shredded me to pieces. Other than the night Blaine confessed to cheating on me, I have never felt so low in my life than I did after the things she said.

“Over the last 6 months I’ve learned a lot of things. I want to apologize for several things. First off, I want to apologize for allowing myself to be sucked into the vortex caused by the Blaine-effect.”

“Well, we both seem to have succumbed to that. I can’t hold that against you.”

“Well, I’m still sorry. You were my friend. A real friend and those are hard to come by and I let that slip away. I’m sorry.”

“I’ve missed you. I accept your apology. We had been apart while you were still in Lima and I knew that you had become Blaine’s new bestie, but in my delusional state, I was glad about that. I did love him and I didn’t want him to be completely miserable because I did love him so much. I couldn’t bear to talk with him because it just hurt too much, but you were there for him and I appreciated that. But at some point along the way, you lost yourself as well. I can’t attribute it to Blaine, but you became hyperfocused on your looks and your body as your only asset. When you came to New York, I had honestly thought that we’d go back to being good friends like we had been and it would be like the Three Musketeers in a way. You were my first guy friend. You lived with me and my family. We had lived together for 10 months. We horsed around and spent time together and had fun. I was actually looking forward to that, but then I got this pod person instead of my friend. You came to New York as Blaine’s bestie and I was pushed out of the trio. Well, there had never actually been a trio anywhere but in my head, but you never spent any time with me after you came. I was traded in for a better model. I was used to it. I let it go. But I was jealous. He had you and I didn’t. You had him and I didn’t. I worked and the two of you went out sightseeing or just hung out around the apartment. At least you washed the dishes.”

Sam laughed, but his mood became somber quickly again. “I have more to apologize for. This wasn’t out of malice or meanness. I really had no idea.”

“What are you talking about?”

“When I stayed in the loft in New York. Blaine told me that it wouldn’t be a problem. I honestly did not find out until last night that Blaine didn’t pay towards the costs. I thought he said not to worry because he was going to cover my share until I got a job. Or at least split things three ways on the rent and then him cover my food. I knew his family was loaded and he really made it seem like a non-issue. I found out that you were paying half the rent the entire time, as were Rachel’s dads.”

“That’s true. She was only 17 when she moved to New York. When we found the loft, LeRoy signed the lease with me. And even though she had turned 18 by the time we resigned for the second year, LeRoy just resigned since he was the one paying half of the rent, not Rachel herself.”

“I didn’t know that. I swear. I thought when we moved in that you, Rachel, and Blaine would split the rent three ways. I was couch surfing for far too long. I was lost, but I never meant for you to have to cover my share of anything. I should have realized when you worked so much, but I just never did the math and I never asked. That’s all on me.”

“At first I didn’t fault you for not taking just any job. I could have applied to a school in New York with rolling enrollment and started school in the fall, but I really wanted to go to NYADA, so I stuck it out and didn’t go anywhere for a semester with the hopes that I’d get in for second semester. So, initially I was fine with the ‘Sam’s trying to be a model’ reasoning I got from Blaine. I knew that modeling requires daytime availability at the drop of a hat. I had worked at Vogue for
long enough to understand that aspect, but when your unemployment seemed to be permanent and
Blaine never started helping with the rent, I got aggravated. I was taking summer classes to get
catch up by fall and working a lot, and when you two moved in over the summer, there was more
pressure. I took extra shifts every time I could. I worked more, had less time for him, but he filled
that empty time with you.”

“I think you are a nurturer. You enjoy taking care of the people you care about. You concern
yourself with the well being of others. But you let people take advantage of you. Rachel did it for
years, the whole time she was in New York with you from what I can tell. Rachel and Blaine are a
lot alike, but I think that Rachel used to genuinely believe that she was the best, whereas Blaine
wanted to believe that he was the best, but needed other people to constantly validate his
amazingness. I think she sees Blaine as a male version of herself. She’s incredibly self-centered
and pretty shallow, but everyone’s seen her bad side. Everyone knows she’s a ‘storm-off-when-I-
don’t-get-my-way’ diva. But she never left you hanging for her share of the bills.”

“He did help occasionally with groceries if we went shopping together. But you’re right that he
didn’t help cover the about $1100 a month I spent on rent and utilities. Rachel’s dads covered the
other $1100. I’m guessing that she never told them that you and Blaine were living there. When
she moved out, they refused to cover any of the utilities anymore. So my expenses went up $200
dollars. I took extra shifts when classes ended in early May. I pretty sure that one reason that
Blaine wanted to have the wedding in the summer because he thought that we could amend our
FAFSA forms, but I couldn’t get it through his head that just because same-sex marriage was legal
in New York, that it wouldn’t affect our financial aid because those forms were from the Federal
Government and same-sex marriages weren’t considered valid at the Federal level.”

“So, since it’s still not been legalized nationwide, it won’t affect your financial aid next year if you
go through with marrying him tomorrow?”

“It won’t. Until it’s recognized on a Federal level, it won’t make any difference.”

Sam texted Mercedes.
“Well, I got into NYU for the spring.”

“So, you’re going back to New York after Christmas?”

“Or before. I can give my notice and let Dalton find someone else to take the position.”

“You’re going to need a couple thousand a month to find a studio or small one bedroom anywhere near NYU.”

“Yeah, I know. Kurt can find a job once we move back.”

“You’ll need a job too.”

“Oh, my parents are going to give me a $1500 a month while I’m in school.”

“Well, that’s kind of them. Then neither of you will have to keep that insane schedule Kurt had before. He’ll be able to be less stressed with having to work fewer hours.”

“He’ll still need to cover his half of the expenses.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, my parents are going to cover my half and he or Burt or whatever will cover his half.”

Mercedes cocked her head to the side. “Come again? You’re going to expect him to work as much as he did before and go to school while you just get to go to school?”

“My family and I will pay half. He and his family will pay half. Seems reasonable to me.”

“I see. Did your parents give you money while you were at NYADA?”

“Kind of. I had a dorm room at NYADA. I just only used it to study sometimes. I didn’t like the idea of communal showers and sharing a room with someone I didn’t know. But that was their requirement for my first year. I had to live on campus in order for them to pay my tuition. I got an allowance. The meal plan only covered 10-meals a week. So, they gave me money for food for the meals the meal plan didn’t cover.”

“You boarded at Dalton. Weren’t you used to dorm life?”

“At Dalton, I had a single room with a private bath. That wasn’t an option at NYADA. Freshman get assigned to double rooms and there are shared bathrooms on each floor.”

“I see.” Mercedes was speechless, but tried to regain her ability to sound calm as quickly as possible. “What are you going to study at NYU?”

“Music, but I think I’m going to focus on music composition and vocal performance, rather than musical theatre like I was at NYADA.”

“So you mentioned Kurt going to a more relaxed school instead of NYADA. Have the two of you talked about that?”

“Oh, not yet, but we will once we’re back in Lima. I don’t think his work-study project is working
out very well. He could just call it quits for this semester and withdraw from his classes and start over again in the spring. He can take fewer classes and take ones that will transfer to another school since the whole internship class is not something common for music programs.”

“So, you think he should apply to transfer to another school for next fall?”

“Yeah. Maybe one of the New York City schools like one of the SUNY campuses. The tuition would be within his budget and he wouldn’t have to keep taking out loans.”

Mercedes couldn’t keep a civil tone anymore on that topic, so she moved on to something else.

“So, your mom came to the wedding. Why was she there? She had never had any reason to have met Brittany or Santana and no reason to attend their wedding.”

“The invitation that came had both of my parents’ names on it, sent to their house. My dad is out of town, so he didn’t come.”

“That doesn’t even make sense.”

“I didn’t mail out the invitations. Mine came to the apartment I was living in with Dave.”

“I saw her walk up to Carole and introduce herself. How is that you and Kurt and been friends and dating and whatever in between for nearly four years and your mom had never met Carole?”

“My parents travel a lot. Burt and Carole travel a lot.”

“It seemed like Kurt didn’t know she was there or he would have been the one to make the introductions. He’s just that kind of person.”

“We were horsing around and just enjoying ourselves.”

“And ‘I’m so excited’?”

“What?”

“The song. You know, the four moms got up and sang with me, Brittany, Santana, and Sugar. Santana’s mom got up an introduced the song that we worked on for 10 minutes outside after we had changed. Where did the dresses come from? How did we just miraculously have 6 dresses to fit the four moms and me and Sugar? There aren’t dress shops selling 6 dresses just our sizes in the middle of a farm in Indiana.”

“Well, I didn’t buy them.”

“Carole and your mom didn’t seem shocked about the two of you getting married. I could see them from where I was standing. Surprised and excited, but not shocked.”

“I don’t know what you’re getting at.”

“Did your mom even know about you and Karofsky?”

“No.”

“And from the lack of shock on Burt and Carole’s face and the fact that he was willing to marry the two of you, I don’t think the two of them knew either.”

“I’m not sure why that matters.”
“Well, it just seems weird to me that you lived with Karofsky for… ? How long did you live with him?”

“Full time, a couple of months. Before that, I stayed at his place a lot over the summer.”

“How did you keep that a secret from your parents?”

“I’m not sure what this has to do with anything. It’s all over and in the past.”

“Humor me.”

“I told them that I was staying with Sam most of the time and that I had moved in with him the last two months since he already had an apartment.”

“Your parents don’t know that Kurt broke up with you last spring do they?”

“No.”

“So, they thought you came back to Ohio at the end of the semester because the dorms aren’t open in the summer. They don’t know that Kurt stayed in New York until two months ago.”

“Right, but I’ll tell Kurt about the dorm before we see my mom when we got to pick up my stuff.”

“I see.”

“I figure that Kurt and I can go on a two-week honeymoon somewhere right after sectionals and then go ahead and move back to New York. I’ve got a place lined up for December.”

“Where are you going to live until then?”

“Well, since I don’t think the internship is working out the way Kurt needs it to, it seems like a good time for him to just let it drop. Rachel knows what she’s doing. Kurt and I can figure out where to stay for the next month.”

“Maybe at your parents’ since they travel so much.”

“Possibly. I can find out when they’ll be out of town.”

“Wait, won’t that give you a huge drive to Dalton everyday.”

“It’s not that bad, about 45 minutes.”

“Wait, where do your parents live?”

“Southeast side of Columbus, about 15 minutes from the airport. I told you they travel a lot.”

“How did you go to McKinley for two years?”

“Oh, that’s a long story.”

“I have time.”

“I rented that house myself. My parents never lived there.”

“Say what?”

“I wanted to be with Kurt. So, instead of going to Dalton, I rented that house. It was actually
“How did you do that?”
“I used the money my parents deposited in my account for my school expenses and didn’t go to Dalton.”
“How did you get away with that?”
“I’ve mentioned that my parents travel a lot. They just never noticed.”
“Never noticed that you went to a different school?”
Blaine shrugged.
“How did you rent a house anyway?”
“I was 18. I signed the rental agreement. I paid a whole year’s rent in one payment. It’s pretty easy to get someone to agree to a year’s rent up front.”
“I see. So you cooked and cleaned and took care of yourself for two whole years?”
“No. I had a housekeeper come in three days a week for half-days. She cooked and put stuff in the freezer and fridge for dinner and she cleaned and did the laundry.”
“And Kurt knew this?”
“He never asked. He knew my parents traveled a lot. He just assumed they were gone on business when he came over.”
“So, when did he meet your parents?”
“Oh, he met mom at a restaurant once when I was still going to Dalton. We went to Columbus to nice restaurant and ate one evening after he had driven to see me.”
“And your dad?”
“They’ve never met.”
“Four years and they’ve never met?”
“He’s not a fan of my sexual orientation.”
“Which helped keep Kurt from asking where your parents were when he went to the house you were renting in Lima.”
“I guess so.”
“So, wait, you were 18 before you started at McKinley?”
“Yeah. The Sadie Hawkins thing my freshman year put me back a year and my birthday is right after the cut off, so I was already one of the oldest in my grade.”
“So, you’re not much younger than Kurt.”
“A little over two months.”
“How did your parents not figure out that you had switched schools at graduation? And before that, your grade reports – did they just never ask to see them?”

“Photoshop is easy enough. I just used old grade reports and changed the name of the classes to the ones I was actually taking. I mailed them to my parents house.”

“And your diploma?”

“Photocopied. I told them I was keeping the original.”

“The ceremony?”

“They were out of town.”

Mercedes phone pinged with a text. She read it.

“Okay. Here’s the deal. You’ve got plenty of snacks over here to eat. You won’t starve. I’m going to go back to Kurt’s hotel room to spend the night. You’re going to stay here. I’ll pay your hotel bill in the morning. I booked the room using your debit card as the card on file. So, I’d suggest just wait until the morning to actually leave. Your car will be in the parking lot somewhere in the morning, wherever there’s an open spot. I’ll leave the your keys and wallet at the front desk for you in the morning.” She got up and walked to the door. “You can get in contact with Kurt any time after you check out tomorrow morning. I’m going to go back and spend one more evening with my oldest and dearest friend before I fly back out to LA tomorrow. I’m not sure when I’ll see you again, so I’ll just say goodbye for now.” She laid his driver’s license on the dresser. “You’ll need that to claim your stuff tomorrow morning.”

“My phone?”

“I’ll leave it with your keys and wallet at the front desk too. I’ll have them stick all of them in the safe under your name and room number, so be sure to note your room number on the way down. You’ll be able to collect them showing your driver’s license. Don’t check out until 9:00 and don’t leave anything behind since you don’t have a keycard to get back in. Everything will paid for and ready for you to pick up at 9:00.”

Deciding not to make any snide quips since freedom was nearly his, he opted to say, “Have a safe trip back to LA.”

“Thanks.” She walked out of the room.
“Why did you ask about whether getting married would affect my financial aid?”

“He got into NYU for next semester.”

“Wait, so he took the job with the Warblers, but he applied to get into NYU for spring term? He wasn’t planning on staying with Dave. He just used Dave. At least that’s how it looks to me.”

“I hadn’t thought about that aspect of it yet. But he would have had to apply back in August or by September at least to have already gotten an acceptance letter.”

“It’s back to the Blaine-effect as you call it.”

“How did he get in to NYU when he washed out of NYADA?”

“Well, technically he got his credits for both semesters, so he didn’t flunk out or lose credit hours. He was just not approved to pass on to the next level courses. He shouldn’t have taken the second year courses, even though I never figured out how he got in them to start with.”

“The Blaine-effect.”

“Of course. But the product didn’t match the hype. NYADA isn’t for the faint of heart. It’s tough. Every year we have to pass those evaluations to move on to the next level of coursework.”

“He probably wrote some incredibly emotional essay.”

“I don’t know. I’m not even sure that I care. My brain is on overload. This whole idea of doing my internship here is stupid. It’s not at all the type of experience that will help me in the future. Madame Tibideaux is probably going to give me an F for my midterm.”

“Is there any way to salvage your grade?”

“I could pick up a couple of 8-week courses starting Monday at OSU or something and withdraw from the work-study course for the semester and do it again next fall, maybe? My other courses are online. But I would have the additional expense of paying for those courses out of pocket.”

“Any other options?”

“Dropping out like Rachel? It’s all such a mess. Since Blaine and I had split and I had lost my other New York friends, I had actually moved into the dorm so I wouldn’t have to commute anymore. I sold off the furniture and made a deal with the landlord about the appliances and that large unit that I loved that was between my room and the living area. I had put my personal stuff and off-season clothing in a super small storage unit because I didn’t know whether I could fit it all in the dorm room. I was only going to keep the storage unit for a month until I could sit down and go through everything, but it’s still there, so whatever I end up doing, I’ll have to go back and my stuff out of storage and move it somewhere.”

“So, if you could completely defy all real-world expectations, where would you go and what would you do?”

“Wow, that’s a tough question.”

“Okay, then let’s break it down. Would you stay here in the US or go somewhere else?”
“I have no real-world restrictions? Like money?”

“No restrictions. No future career repercussions.”

“I’d go to Paris. I’ve always wanted to go and you said I had no limitations on my choice. I’d go there and then go around the country and see the castles and just relax for a while. I need a break.”

“What do you have at your parents’ house?”

“A couple of suitcases of clothes, my laptop, some shoes, my textbooks for this semester. Why?”

“I’m trying to figure out how to get it out of their house without getting caught.”

“Why don’t I just walk in like I belong and take everything I brought with me and act like it’s completely normal for me to be collecting my things since they’re going to be expecting me and Blaine to go on some sort of vacation, even if it’s a short one. They might not even be home if they already flew back to DC.”

“Good point.”

“So, if we left tonight, we could arrive after dinner, so you can avoid a lot of interaction and you can collect your stuff and we could leave.”

“I suppose so. Why tonight?”

“Because I want Blaine to stay until tomorrow, so that by the time he gets there, you’ll be long gone with no trace of where to look for you. If you act completely normal, they’ll think you’ve left with him for a trip, like you said. So, no one will ask a lot of questions since you obviously didn’t leave yesterday afternoon prepared to get married.”

“Where are we going to go?”

“I don’t know yet, but you can just say that you don’t know and they’ll think Blaine is surprising you with the destination.”

“Okay. You do realize this sounds over the top and a little nuts, right? He’s not going to stalk me.”

“I’m not sure about that. The more I’ve talked to him today, the more all of this seems quite planned.”

“What do you mean?”

“He intentionally isolated you from the friends you had made in New York. Then, you were totally not going along with his ‘Let’s get married right away’ plan. And he fights with you over everything. After he came back here, he took up with the one person that would bother you the most, well besides me and I had already turned him down. Plus, he had stolen my friendship from you already.”

“Wait, what?”

“I knew he had a crush on me, but I turned him down.”

“When was this?”

“Around Regionals our senior year.”
“So, right before the proposal.”

“Yes.”

“As much as you don’t want to see it, he wants you as his caregiver. His wife. His nurturer. He wants to have his steady input of affection and adoration always at his beck and call while he seeks out sexual encounters outside your relationship.”

“You think he’s cheated on me more than the once?”

“I would bet on it.”

“I guess now that I think about it, he cheated on Dave with me.”

“What do you mean?”

“The other night at Rachel’s party. When I walked outside with him as he was leaving, he stopped and turned back and kissed me, and then walked away.”

Sam changed the topic. “I confronted him about the engagement at Dalton and the fact that he never wore a ring.”

“Oh?”

“I told him that since he was the one that cheated, it would have made more sense for him to be the one to wear a ring signifying that he was taken – to help him remember.”

“Oh, wow. You weren’t holding back.”

“Nope. He told me that men don’t wear engagement rings.”

Kurt sighed. “I know he went to my dad to ask permission to ask me to marry him. I’m not a freaking girl and that’s an archaic tradition anyway. Women don’t need permission from their fathers to get married anymore.”

“When I asked him if he had had sex with anyone besides you, his random, and Dave, he wouldn’t answer.”

“So you think he was cheating on me in New York or cheating on Dave around Lima?”

“Maybe both. The question is whether it matters to the choice you have to make. Do you want to be married to Blaine?”

“Something just popped into my head. How did Blaine’s mom get invited yesterday? Why would she come to Britt and Santana’s wedding? She and my parents had never even met before yesterday.”

“I don’t have an answer to that.”

“And even more strange is where did those dresses come from?”

“What dresses?”

“Those practically screamingly bright, fringed dresses that all the moms were wearing. How did they just happen to have four dresses that went with the two Troubletones outfits in a barn in rural Indiana. Carole and Blaine’s mom had never met. I’m sure that Mrs. Anderson hadn’t met any of
the adults or Santana or Brittany. The mostly likely person for to have met would have been you.”

“Nope. Never saw her until yesterday.”

“So, where did those dresses come from? It’s not like any of the moms are the size that would just fit in random dresses from the costume room at the school. No one was wearing the same color. The styles were varied, but went together. That was pre-planned. Carole was there because my dad was officiating, but who on earth invited Mrs. Anderson?”

“You still call her Mrs. Anderson after four years of knowing Blaine?”

“Yeah. I’d only met her once and I’ve never met Mr. Anderson and he wasn’t there yesterday. But someone orchestrated that. I have another question. Where is the white jacket I was wearing?”

“I made sure it was in the right place to go back with the rest our jackets to go back to the rental company.”

“Oh, good. Thank you.”

“The tux jacket that I had on for the ceremony needs to go back to Brittany, I guess. I don’t know if it was a rental as well.”

“Who knows? We’ll just leave it at your parents’ house and let Carole to figure out who it needs to go to, if anyone.”

“So, if we go this evening after dinner and pick up all of my stuff, where am I going to go? I don’t have a vehicle anymore. It’s not like I can just throw my suitcases in the trunk and drive off into the sunset somewhere.”

“So, you’ve decided for certain that you don’t want to go to the county courthouse tomorrow and get married for real?”

“I have decided that I do NOT want to do that. I am not ready to be married to Blaine. Too much of what we’ve talked about has brought up too many unanswered questions for me to feel confident in taking that step. He’s going to see this as Mercedes’ fault and yours for putting doubts in my mind when I already said ‘I do’ yesterday.”

“I don’t care. I’m not his bestie anymore. I’m Sam. I’m me. I’m going to figure my own life out and neither one of us are sidekicks, Kurt.”

“Mercedes told me that she was giving me time to figure out if I was going to be the leading man in my own life story.”

“That’s about the crux of it, isn’t it? A best friendship or a romantic relationship isn’t about a lead character and his or her sidekick. It’s about two equal partners.”

“It should be. I’ve never lived that though. I take that back. I did. Twice. Once with you as my closest male friend and once with Adam. Well, I could have with Adam, if I had let myself. He would have never pushed me into the supporting role.”

“I let myself get drawn into all of this mess again. I’m going to quit McKinley. I need a break too. And in time, I’m hoping we can be really good friends again.”

“You were the first male friend I had that he pushed out of my life. Granted, he didn’t make me quit spending time with you, but he knew that we were close and he never liked it, and then he
stole you away from me. You were just the first.”

“Well, I’ve come to my senses and I’d like to have my position back.”

Kurt smiled and nodded. “You’re definitely getting there.”

There was a knock on the hotel door. Sam got up to answer it.
Chapter 10

Mercedes walked out to Sam’s truck and got inside. She opened her mail app and wrote down as many of the facts that she had gathered from speaking to Blaine before she forgot any of them. She saved it in her drafts folder. Once she had it saved, she sat and looked through the list. What she read seemed crazy, but Blaine had sat there answering her like the answers were no big deal.

The thing that got to her the most was the ring. How quick Blaine was to take it off and hide it. He had never worn an engagement ring either. She didn’t like that whole vibe at all.

She wasn’t ready to talk to Kurt yet.

She looked up restaurants on her phone. She found a Chinese place with good reviews not that far away. She drove there and parked again. She was still confused by everything she had learned.

She eventually got out and walked along the sidewalk of the strip mall, all the way to the east end, then to the west end, back to the east end, and back toward the west end, but this time she stopped in front of the restaurant and went inside to place an order. She waited for 20 minutes. The place was pretty busy for a Sunday evening, so she figured the food would be pretty good since the place seemed to be so popular.

Once it was finally ready, she drove back to the hotel where she and Kurt were staying. She found a parking spot and carried the two bags of food she ordered inside. She got in the elevator and rode up to the fourth floor, wishing the whole time she wasn’t going to go do what she had already decided to do. She had already delayed talking to him by nearly three hours since she had left Blaine’s room.

She got to their room, knocked lightly and waited for Sam to open the door.

After Mercedes left, Blaine stripped back down to his underwear and grabbed his bag of food and plopped down on the bed with the remote. He finally found something he was willing to watch and scooted up in the bed with his snacks and spent the rest of the evening snacking and channel surfing. He was pretty tired from not getting a good night’s sleep the night before and he was looking forward to seeing Kurt the next morning, so he showered and went to bed early. He called down for an 8:00 wake up call, so he could be ready, eat, and check out right at 9:00. Then he’d call Kurt and drive to wherever he was staying and get started on their plans.
Chapter 11

From this point on, the story is continuous – no more jumping between locations.

“Hey, Mercedes.” Sam got up. “Let me help you with those.” He grabbed the bags and put them on the small table in the corner of the room. “I’ll go grab us some drinks from the vending machine.”

Mercedes smiled at Kurt. “I’ll be right back.” She stepped into the bathroom, not because she really HAD to go, but because she needed a few more minutes to compose herself and her thoughts.

She came back out as Sam came in the room. She grabbed her drink from him.

“There’s just one chair, so let’s move the table.” Sam pulled the table closer to the end of the bed.

He and Kurt sat on the end of Mercedes’ bed next to each other and Mercedes took the chair. They opened the bags and distributed the food. None of them seemed ready to break the silence, so they all sat and ate without talking.

Once they finished, they put the empty containers back in the bags. Sam grabbed the bags and put them in the wastebasket. Mercedes got up and sat along the edge of the bed she had slept on and put her head in her hands. Sam pushed the chair and table back where they had been. He and Kurt moved to side of the bed Kurt had slept in and sat down facing Mercedes.

She sat back up. “I told Blaine we’d leave his stuff for him and he could check out at 9:00. So, we’re going to be there at 6:00, right?”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“Why so early?” Kurt asked.

Sam answered. “Because we want to be long gone by the time he checks out.”

“I told him he was free to call you after he checked out. I am 100% certain he thinks you’ll just be waiting for him to call here so he can drive over and pick you up and then drive to the courthouse to make things legal.”

Kurt took a deep breath and sighed. “I see.”

“Kurt, I learned a lot of things talking to him after I took him back to his room. Really bothersome things.”

“Oh.”

“The thing that continues to jump to the forefront of my mind is not the lies of omission or the flat out lack of sharing important information with you is the fact that he came out of the bathroom after he had showered and he wasn’t wearing his wedding ring. He had slipped it into the tiny pocket of his jeans. When I asked about it, he said he wasn’t used to wearing jewelry and it was bothering him.”

“Why did that bother you the most?”

“Think, Kurt,” Sam said. “What kind of people keep their wedding rings from making permanent
indentations on their ring fingers?”

Kurt didn’t answer.

Sam answered his own question. “Guys who don’t want the people they’re trying to hook up with to know that they’re married.”

“You don’t know that for sure. Maybe he was telling the truth. It took me a while to get used to wearing the engagement ring since I had never worn rings before.”

“But you don’t get used to something by taking it off,” Sam said.

“And I don’t know what to believe,” Mercedes said. “This is a list of the unbelievable things he told me today.” She pulled up the document she had created and handed her phone to Kurt. “Read that. You too Sam.”

Kurt started reading and didn’t make it very far. “He had a dorm room last year?” He went back to reading. “His parents live on the southeast side of Columbus?” He kept reading. “He expects me to keep working as many hours as I did before and he’s going to use the money his parents give him for his half of the expenses?” He took a deep breath and continued to read. “He thinks I should consider a lower-stress school like SUNY so I won’t have to, wait what? He thinks I’m not good enough to be at NYADA when he’s the one that washed out?” He turned the phone over.

“Well, it was a combination of an attitude that you had to work too hard to do well and the fact that if you went to SUNY next fall after you declare that you’re married on your financial aid paperwork, that you’d be able to get more financial aid.”

“He just doesn’t want me to go to a prestigious school that he washed out of is what it sounds like to me.”

“He wants you to withdraw from the internship and enroll in classes that can transfer to another school next semester and be more practical.”

“More like he wants Kurt to go to an easier school so he can work more hours and get a less prestigious degree and be his housewife,” Sam snarked. “I’m going to say something that I was going to keep to myself, but seeing all of that, even though I didn’t see all of it yet is enough to make me change my mind.”

“What?” Kurt asked.

“I point blank asked him if he had sex with anyone besides you, his random, and Dave and he refused to answer, saying that you were already married so it didn’t matter.”

“Sounds like his response when I asked him to tell me about when he cheated on me.”

“There’s something else. And I’m incredibly ashamed and embarrassed about. But I feel like you should know.”

“It’s okay, Sam. It can’t be any worse than some of the things I’ve done when it comes to him.”

“I mentioned this earlier when we were talking, but Mercedes doesn’t know. Our senior year, we did a Guilty Pleasures week when Schue was gone.”

Kurt said, “The girls were better than the Spice Girls. I saw the video.”
“I saw that video. Unique showed me. The girls did kick butt. I don’t know anything about what was going on though. Go on.”

“Okay. I was drinking Kool-Aid by the gallons at that point. Blaine confessed to me that I was his guilty pleasure.”

“What?” Mercedes said. “That was in the spring at some point. He was trying to get back with Kurt or was it after the engagement?”

“It was before. It gets worse. I’m sorry. Earlier today I asked him what he would have done if I had said that I was in to him too. I asked him to be honest. He said he would have kissed me. I told him that I was pretty certain that if got up and kissed him this morning when we were sitting there talking in the dark, that he wouldn’t have stopped me from kissing him and then going as far as I was willing to go. His response was that he was married. Not that I was wrong, but seemed to be relying on the fact that since I knew that he was married that I wouldn’t do it.”

Kurt closed his eyes. “How can these things be true? I feel like I’m in some insane dream where up is down and down is up and nothing I know to be true is true anymore. In your Kool-Aid drinking period, as you just called it, did you ever give him the impression that you liked guys?”

“No. He’s definitely not my type anyway.”

Mercedes spoke up. “What do you mean?”

“Even with me under his spell, he didn’t appeal to me in that way, ever. But I brushed it off. I shouldn’t have. After he cheated, and then told me I was his guilty pleasure, I still helped him with that insane proposal. I’m sorry. I’m just really sorry. I know now that I was already depressed by then. I had been since the fall. When I had to spend another year in high school living away from my own family and you and Finn were gone, I slid into depression. I countered my downward spiraling thoughts with spandex suits and superhero stupidity and marrying Brittany before the world ended? Looking back, I never believed the world was ending, but I was actually hoping it would. If it all just ended in a cosmic big bang, I wouldn’t have to figure out what to do with my life. I didn’t recognize my depression obviously. My GPA and SAT scores were so low – I knew getting into college was never going to happen. Hitching my trailer to Blaine’s super-focused life made me his sidekick, but it made me something when I felt like I was nothing. And getting you back was his sole focus at that point, so it became my focus as well. Nothing I did made me happy and I just got caught up in doing what made him happy.”

“I’m sorry too, Kurt. I didn’t help plan it, but I showed up and threw my support in without even asking you why you were so tense around him and why him being supportive wasn’t taking the edge off your stress.”

“Mercedes, you’re sure he actually said these things today.”

“I’m positive. I walked out of the hotel, straight to the truck, and wrote those things down. I dawdled for nearly three hours before coming back here. I just didn’t want to tell you those things, but I can’t live with myself keeping that information from you. I need to ask you something.”

“Go ahead.”

“Did you tell your parents that you had broken up with Blaine?”

“I told my dad that I had called off the Labor Day wedding. I told him that I wasn’t ready.”

“So, he didn’t know you had actually broken up with Blaine and that Blaine had been seeing
Karofsky for nearly five months.”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Embarrassment, I suppose.”

“He didn’t notice that you weren’t seeing Blaine after you came back?”

“He’s in DC for several weeks at a time and then comes home for a few days. Carole goes with him now since Finn’s not around anymore. They’re just not around enough to notice and I’m not a kid for them to ask ‘Who are you going out with? When will you be back?’ and stuff like that. I just came and went as I pleased whether they were home or not.” Kurt finally turned the phone back over and started to read again. Once he made it all the way through, he said, “It’s just so hard to believe.” He handed the phone to Sam so he could read it. He flopped back on the bed for a while giving Sam time to read.

Kurt popped back up. “I have a ridiculous answer to how all of this came about.”

“What it is?” Sam asked.

“Blaine and Sue are the masterminds. How or why they would work together I have no potential explanation for, but think about it. Sue never gave a care whatsoever about my relationship with Blaine until this fall. She built a fake elevator to lock us in to force us to kiss. She was the one that took us back to see Brittany and Santana so Brittany could talk us into getting married at the spur of the moment. She rounded up all of Dave’s previous partners. She had to have been the one to send the invitation to Blaine’s parents since there was zero reason for his family to attend the wedding of two people they had never met. The dresses – he would have never been able to choose dresses the right size. The bear in their apartment – Sue is smart enough to know that ‘bears’ refers to burly gay men. It’s like Blaine chose the most gullible and desperate-for-a-real-relationship gay guy that he knew and charmed him with the Blaine-effect, as Sam is calling it. I feel really bad for Dave. Even if all of those guys that were at Breadstix that day were just guys he dated and didn’t actually sleep with, he’s had no luck at finding someone to settle down with, which is what he did awfully quickly with Blaine. Dave and I had resolved our issues. I don’t think Dave settled down with Blaine to hurt me. I think he genuinely thought that Blaine cared about him.”

“I’m sure he did. Why else would he ask Blaine to live with him,” Mercedes said.

“And that whole speech Brittany gave us. It didn’t make sense, not that what she says always sounds like it makes sense, but usually when you think about it long enough, she does make sense. She gave me a ‘move on and find someone new’ speech when I went to apologize to her for interrupting Santana’s proposal. That’s most likely what she came up with on her own. The whole ‘get married with us – you were our role models in high school’ spiel she gave in the barn doesn’t fit with her previous suggestion to find someone new. Plus, she dated you for most of your senior year before she went off to MIT.”

“God, I had lost my mind. I feel like someone gave me stupid pills. Is that even possible?”

“Depression can really screw with a person’s ability to think and make decisions,” Kurt said.

“My therapist put me on something for depression when I first came back. She weaned me back off of it by the end of the summer when I was doing better. It really did cloud my mind.”
Mercedes said, “I never figure out what happened at that school after we left.”

“Me neither. Sugar and Joe were like MIA 80% of the time. Schue wasn’t there a lot of the time. Miss P bailed on the Valentine’s wedding. I was stupidly Blaine’s sidekick. And the stupidity continued when I followed him to New York. God, I need to get my life together.”

“You and me both,” Kurt said. “So, what’s the ‘we’re leaving town at 6:00 plan’?”

“Well, you’re the one who has to figure a lot of stuff out. You kept your parents in the dark about a lot of stuff. And Blaine kept you in the dark about a lot of stuff and flat out lied to you about other stuff. So, your parents are twice as uninformed. When he starts to call you at 9:00 tomorrow morning and you don’t answer, it won’t take long for him to call your dad and start to blab about how we kidnapped him after the wedding and now you’ve disappeared. One scenario is he goes to the press first. It will make headlines, ‘Congressman’s son kidnapped after wedding. Hasn’t been seen since Saturday evening.’ He has no proof that we have been with you, so if he’s interrogated, he can say with absolute truth that he has not seen you and doesn’t know where you are. He’ll be able to name me and Mercedes and they’ll put an APB out on us and search for my truck.”

“So I have to answer his call?”

Sam responded, “I don’t know. Let’s focus on what you want to do first and think about how he fits into it afterwards.”

“First question is whether you want to be married to him. Do you want to go with him to the county courthouse tomorrow morning and do everything legally?” Mercedes asked.

“No. I told Sam that earlier.”

“Alright then, second question. Do you want to stay in Lima?” Sam asked.

“No.”

“Where do you want to go instead?”

“I don’t know. I don’t have anywhere else to go. Everyone I know also knows him. Plus, it just kills me to think of withdrawing from NYADA for the semester. Madame Tibideaux is not the type to cross. And I worked so hard to get caught up so that I could graduate on time, even though I started a semester late.”

“But you said it’s not going well, and you think she’s going to give you an F on what you’ve done so far. So, which is worse, withdrawing or flunking?”

“I’m not sure, actually.”

“Your parents have a place in DC. You could couch-surf there for a while. Not ideal, but DC’s a cool place,” Sam suggested.

“That’s true. I’ve never gone and stayed and done the tourist thing. But if I withdraw this late in the semester, I won’t get any of my tuition back. I borrowed so much for this semester. I can barely think about it. I knew I wouldn’t be able to work as much because of the internship taking up so much of my time. I still have the two online classes I’m taking that I have schoolwork for as well. I can log into the school system and see if I got any money reimbursed from not staying in the dorm this semester or if backing out and coming here was non-refundable. Give me a few minutes.” Kurt plopped back on the bed again and connected to the internet and logged in. He sat back up, turned, and leaned against the headboard, completely focused on his phone.
Mercedes shook her head sadly a few times, and Sam just sat there.

After about 15 minutes, later Kurt spoke. “Okay. I got a 75% reimbursement on my dorm room and board fees. I have until tonight at 11:59pm to withdraw from a course and get an automatic W, which means it won’t count against my grade point average. I won’t get of my tuition for the course back though, and it would drop me below full-time status. NYADA does have a reciprocal agreement with some other universities, which would allow me to enroll in online courses at one of those schools through the portal on the NYADA website. Enrollment for 2nd 8-week courses closes tonight though since the 2nd 8-week session starts tomorrow. So, if I’m going to do that, I would have to do it quickly.”

“It seems like the best choice given the other two choices of getting an F or withdrawing completely.”

“I doubt there’s anything that would fulfill any NYADA requirement at any of the other schools though. But maybe it would still be better to stay full-time because it really messes with financial aid if I drop below full-time status. I’m not getting any grants anyway, but it messes with how much I’m eligible to borrow I think.”

Mercedes said, “Why don’t you look through the portal or whatever you called it and see if there’s anything that looks remotely useful or at least interesting.”

“I’m going to check. This could take a little bit though.”

“That’s okay. We’re fine,” Mercedes said.

“Actually, I’m going to write out a list like Mercedes did while you’re doing that.” Sam pulled his phone out.

Mercedes slipped her shoes off and lay back on the bed.

Kurt nodded and went back to focusing on his phone.

An hour later, Kurt put his phone down and looked satisfied. “Well, I just enrolled in a French literature course as an elective, which isn’t offered at NYADA, but will count in my free choice elective credit hours. And I’m taking History of Theatre Design, which will directly transfer to my required list of courses for NYADA. I dropped the Junior Internship course. I’m sure to get an earful from Madame Tibideaux, but I just can’t stay in Lima. I’ll need to pick up the textbooks for those courses somehow though. I also went from 16 credit hours down to 12, which is the minimum to retain full time status. But I don’t think I can handle three 8-week courses. That’s just an enormous amount of material to cover in 8 weeks.”

“So, back to our plan for tomorrow morning since that’s taken care of,” Mercedes said.

“Well, first off, we’ll spilt up and one of us will drive Blaine’s car over to the hotel he’s staying at. We’ll drive it around to the back of the lot and park it on the opposite side of his room, so he doesn’t see us arrive.”

“You can just leave me at Starbuck’s somewhere or something, so that I’m not there at all in case he’s standing outside watching for us.”

“That’s a better idea. We drop Kurt off somewhere, go park Blaine’s car at the back of the lot, pay
his bill, leave his stuff behind, and go back for Kurt,” Sam said.

Kurt said, “If we go that early, it will be dark out still, which will be better. I think that Mercedes should park the car, and then get in your truck. You drive around to the hotel loading area, let her get out, drop the stuff off, and pay the bill. That way she can hop right back in the truck and you can drive away.”

“Then that’s what we’ll do,” Mercedes said. “The question is where we go from there.”

“When’s your flight?” Kurt asked.

“2:00.”

“Now that I think about it, I don’t think that Carole and Dad will even be home. I imagine that they flew back to DC at some point today. Before we make any more plans, what are you going to do Sam? You said you were going to quit to get away from Sue. What about your apartment?”

“It’s free. It’s part of my job. If I quit, there’s no apartment.”

“So, do you want to go with me, wherever I’m going?”

“Sure. We’ll have to go pick my stuff up too. I don’t have any furniture. It’s a tiny one-bedroom furnished place in the building she’s housing the sports team players’ families that she lured to McKinley.”

“Alright. So, we leave here by 6:30. We can be to Sam’s apartment by 7:45 at the latest, but we should wait because the students who live there will see us moving stuff out. So, we go to my parents’ house first. We load up all of my stuff, and then we go get Sam’s stuff. Maybe 2-3 hours total. So, we could leave by 10:30 to get Mercedes to the airport by noon.”

“That will work,” Sam said. “I’ll call in sick.”

“I’ll text Rachel before it’s time for Glee Club to meet.”

“I doubt she’s expecting you to show up,” Mercedes pointed out.

“That’s true.” Kurt picked his phone up again. “It’s a little over 6 hours to drive from the Columbus airport to DC. We can stop for lunch and still make it to my parents’ apartment before 8:00.”

“That would work,” Sam said. “But you’ll have to tell them what’s going on.”

“I know.”

“Alright then, let’s get to sleep,” Mercedes said. “I’ll change first.” She came back out a few minutes later.

“I’m going to shower and I’ll be right out. Go ahead and turn the lights off. I’ll be fine.” He grabbed the bag with his underwear and socks and went into the bathroom. He put the dirty underclothes in his other bag when he came out and laid the hoodie out neatly on the dresser. He slipped the sweats off and laid them folded in half on top of the hoodie. He walked between the beds and sat down where he had been sitting and realized that Sam was in his bed. He smiled and lay down flat on his back staring up into the darkness. He could hear Mercedes softly snoring.

Sam rolled onto his side. He put his hand on Kurt’s shoulder. He spoke in a barely audible voice.
“You can do this. You are worth more than being pushed repeatedly to the background, being lied to and cheated on. He’s already shown that he can’t help but push himself into the limelight and lies seem to come out of his mouth as frequently as the truth. I know this is hard, but I’m going to be there for you this time. There are so many things I wish I could change. At least this time, I think I’ve done the right thing.”

“Thanks, Sam.” Kurt turned on his side to face Sam. “Are you sure you just want to walk away from your job and life in Lima?”

“I need to make a break from the crazy. I’ve been pseudo-dating Rachel and I don’t even like Rachel. Something there makes me crazy.”

“Okay. As long as you’re sure. Is your truck in good condition?”

“Yeah, I just had it at your dad’s shop for a tune up last week since I knew I’d be taking it on a trip.”

“Good.” Kurt sniffled. He tried not to, but it escaped anyway.

“Will you let me hold you?”

Kurt didn’t move.

“It’s okay if you don’t want me to, but we were never weird about that kind of thing before, but I know that I’ve let you down and you don’t trust me like you used to.”

“It’s just that I slipped my sweats off before I got in bed. I actually figured you were in Mercedes’ bed.”

“Oh, no. That ship sailed. She’s out in LA and traveling all around. We’ve moved past where we were last spring. I love her, but we’re just not meant to be. She has goals and plans that I just don’t fit in. Oh, and I don’t care if you just in your boxers and a tank. You are a gentleman and you would never do anything unwanted to anyone. And I’m in my boxers and a t-shirt too. I’ll still hold you, if you’ll let me.”

“Okay.”

Sam flipped back and moved his arm and let Kurt put his head on his chest. He put his arm around Kurt’s shoulders. “I don’t know how, but you’re going to be okay.”

Kurt nodded and tried to relax. It didn’t take long for them both to fall asleep.

Sam’s phone alarm went off at 5:00. He scooted free of Kurt’s grasp and went and showered and redressed in the hoodie, jeans, and Chucks. Once he was dressed, he woke Mercedes up so she could get ready.

When she was in the shower, Sam packed all of his stuff into the large bag that the shoes had been in. He kept the shoeboxes in case they would be useful when they packed up their stuff in a few hours. He got Kurt up and handed him his clothes and sat down on Mercedes’ bed in the dark.

“You can get dressed in the dark and then turn the light on, so you can pack your stuff up and get your socks and shoes on.”
“M’kay. Thanks for last night. I slept surprisingly well.” He dressed quickly.

“You’re welcome.”

Kurt pressed the light switch on the bedside table. He got up and grabbed another pair of socks out of his bag and put them on. He grabbed the new shoes and put them on and adjusted the laces until they were comfortable and tied them up. “Thanks again for getting these for me. They’re great. They’ll be perfect for sightseeing, which you are going to do with me, right?”

“Sure.”

“I have so many things to figure out, but for today, it’s one foot in front of the other and packing as efficiently as we can. We’re going to need a tarp or something.”

“Oh, I have a lockable cover on the bed of my truck. I know you probably just didn’t notice is because it was rolled up most of the time. But it’s down now.”

“Perfect.”

“I know,” Mercedes spouted as she came out of the bathroom.

Kurt rolled his eyes. “Let’s get going. I want to grab free food before we go. I just need to brush my teeth.”

“I’ll be ready as soon as you are,” she said.

Kurt brought out his toothpaste, toothbrush, and deodorant and put it in the bag and tied it shut and put it inside the other bag. He stuck his phone, wallet, and keys in his pockets. “Ready.”

Mercedes put the tux jacket in her garment bag for the trip to Lima. They double-checked the room and went down to eat and check out.

They dropped Kurt off at a McDonald’s just a block away from the hotel. They followed Kurt’s plan and Sam waited in the driver’s seat for Mercedes to come back out.

She paid the bill and left Blaine’s stuff. She told the clerk that he’d be down at 9:00 to pick it up. She left as quickly as possible and got back in the truck. They collected Kurt, who had three cups of coffee in a carrier when he got in the truck.

They made good time to Lima. Kurt left the tux jacket, pants, shirt, and tie on his bed. He put the wedding band in an envelope and put it on top of the tux jacket. He packed up everything he had brought that was clean in his suitcases. He grabbed a trash bag and dumped his laundry into it. He found a box in the garage and put his textbooks and his satchel in it. The three of them loaded his stuff in the bed of the truck with it parked in the garage.

“Since we’re certain he’ll call right at 9:00, we have to be out of town before 10:00 or he could be here before we’re gone. We didn’t take that into consideration in our original plan. We have to hurry because once he knows I’m here, he’ll be on his way here immediately.”

They parked as close as they could to Sam’s apartment and hurried inside. Kurt took trash bags and covered his hanging clothes and then put all of Sam’s bedding into two trash bags. Mercedes dumped his laundry into a trash bag and then used his laundry basket to put all of the clothes from his dresser in, and then covered it with a trash bag. Sam brought a box with him from the
Hummel’s and used it to pack everything else in the apartment that was his, which wasn’t a lot, so it went quickly.

By 8:50, they were heading out of town.

Kurt got the phone call he was expecting right at 9:01. He let the call go unanswered, then texted back that he couldn’t talk because he was in Lima packing. Sam continued to drive as quickly as the speed limit +5 would allow.

Kurt got a text at 9:30 that said, “Halfway there. See you soon.”

“I’ve got 30 minutes to think up what I’m going to say next because that’s when he’s going to pull up to my parents’ house and find out that I’m not there.”

“Tell him you had to take me to the airport.”

“Do you have that Find Your Friends app active?”

“I don’t think so. I’ll check though.” Kurt looked through his phone. “I don’t even know how to check.”

Sam pulled over. “Slide over and drive, Mercedes.” Sam went around and got in the passenger seat. “Give me your phone.”

Mercedes turned back out on the road and kept going toward the airport.

Sam pressed a series of things on the phone. “Blaine had activated it at some point because he’s the only one on your friends list that you had approved to be able to see your location. I just turned it off.”

Kurt closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “So, when he texted, he could have just checked where I was?”

“Yes. He could see where you were up until just now. But I’m 100% sure that he’s been driving and not stopping every five minutes to see where you are. But he will know the next time he tries to check your location and it says location unavailable that you’ve figured out that he’s tracking you or that you powered your phone down.”

“Check your phone. He probably did the same thing to your phone at some point in time.”

Sam took his phone out and looked. “Damn him. Mine is set to show him my location too. Well, no more of that.” He pressed a series of things on his phone and stopped Blaine from being able to see his location.

“I was going to say we should have a nice lunch together, but I want to keep as much distance between you and Blaine as possible. So, I’m just going to jump out at the airport and have a nice lunch by myself while you to continue to make the trek to DC. He’s only an hour behind and he’s familiar with the drive and may be willing to speed to close the gap. I’m going to pull over at the next exit and we’re going to switch places one last time. Which one of you wants to drive?”

“I’ll do it,” Sam said. “I’ve driven this stretch tons of times, just like Kurt, and he needs time to think.”

About five minutes later, Mercedes pulled over and traded spots with Sam and they got right back on the highway.
“I wonder how long ago he activated that on my phone.”

“I don’t think there’s any way to tell,” Sam said.

At 10:05, Kurt’s phone rang again. He let it ring through. He texted Blaine.

--OMW to airport. M’s flight after lunch.

--Call me when you get back to Lima. I know you don’t like to drive and talk on the phone. I need to pack too.

“Well, it seems like he’s going to pretend that he’s packing in Lima. I bet he has a suitcase packed in his trunk since I’m pretty certain that the surprise wedding wasn’t a surprise to him.”

“Probably, but he if waits in Lima for you to get back, then we’ll have a huge headstart once he realizes that you aren’t coming back to Lima.”

“You know this is going to be a disaster, right? I know that you two wanted me to read those websites, but you had only had the chance to read through them once. Those videos I watched warned me about what’s going to happen. Sam and Tina were my replacements for the constant validation that he needs. Now that Sam has walked away as well… I never told anyone about what he did after I broke up with him. It was non-stop flowers and gifts delivered. Things he knew I wanted like DVD boxed sets of TV shows I like. Music CDs. I started refusing them. He wormed his way back by realizing that showering me with gifts was the wrong way to go. He gave me space. I let myself be pulled back into his orbit at the not-wedding. Biggest mistake. By Regionals, he had worked his mind up to the point that getting engaged was the solution. He staged that whole big production to prove to everyone how amazing he is. Most of those people had no idea why we had been broken up and the students from the deaf school knew nothing about us. I was seen as ‘coming to my senses’. That’s how I felt. There was no saying ‘no’. Then, I’d be the bad guy again. I’m going to do what I can to not lie and try to hold him off until we get to DC. I’m going to deactivate my social media accounts and I’m not sure what to do about my phone.” He turned to Mercedes. “For now, just don’t answer calls from unknown numbers or ones that block the outgoing caller ID because he’ll try that to get in contact with you.”

“You really think he’s going to go off the deep end like that?” she asked.

“Fake elevator.”

“Right,” she said.

“Let’s sing,” Sam suggested.

“Sing what?” Mercedes asked.

“Sing what?” Mercedes asked.

“Just start singing and we’ll join in.”

At 10:30, Mercedes slid out of the seat and Sam unlocked the back and got her garment bag and suitcase out. Sam hugged her first, and then Kurt hugged her before she grabbed her stuff from Sam.

“Stay in touch this time,” Kurt said. “Thank you for saving me.”

“That’s what friends are for. No more of the way I’ve been. This time I’m here for you.” She
squeezed him and took her stuff from Sam and headed inside.

Kurt got in the passenger side of the truck. “So, DC, here we come. I still have the snacks you brought me from Target. We can pull those out from under the seat if you get hungry. We can also trade at some point if you want.”

“It’s fine. Let’s just get moving. I figure he expects you back in Lima between 1:00 and 2:00, depending on Mercedes’ actual flight time, since your text made it sound like you were having lunch before her flight. It’s 10:40.” He stopped talking while Kurt directed him to get on 270 to 70, and then started talking again. “So, if we just keep driving we’ll have about a 3.5 hour head start, if he figures out where you’re going.”

“I figure if I don’t call around 2:00, he’ll call again. I’m just going to turn my phone off.”

“That’s fine. So, we need to go to a bookstore tomorrow morning and get those textbooks you need. And I need to go somewhere and buy some storage totes to put my stuff in. I don’t really need expensive suitcases since we’re not flying anywhere. We can do that when we go out to get your books.”

“Sounds good. I want to read that list you made on your phone last night while I was on my phone completely changing my life.”

Sam handed Kurt his phone and told him the passcode and where to find what he had written.

Near Cumberland, Maryland, Sam pulled off the interstate and they drove through an Arby’s drive-thru and got a couple of sandwiches and drinks. They switched positions and Kurt drove the rest of the way to the outskirts of DC. Sam put the address of the apartment into his phone and got specific directions the rest of the way. He also called Carole.

“Sam, sweetie. Are you alright?”

“I’m fine. I just need to make sure that you’re actually at the apartment in DC.”

“I am. Why?”

“Well, Kurt and I will be there in about 20 minutes. I just wanted to make sure you’re there. And I figure we also need some type of visitor’s parking tag or something. And don’t tell Burt until we get up to the apartment.”

“Yes, of course. I’ll go downstairs in 10 minutes and wait at the opening to the parking garage. I’ll get in and show you where to park.”

“We’ll see you soon then.”

“Okay, sweetie. Bye.”

“She’s an awesome mom.”

“She is. I think you lived with her longer than I did.”

“I might have. It’s close either way.”

They followed the directions and it didn’t take long to get there.
Carole said, “There, to the right – any of those spots. Just put this hang tag on your rearview mirror.”

Sam pulled into a spot. Carole slid out and waited for Kurt. As soon as he stepped out, she wrapped her arms around him and pulled him close “Whatever it is, we’re here for you. We love you, honey.”

Kurt nodded and cried. “Let’s get our stuff. It will take more than one trip.”

“Oh, I just thought of something. Sam, get back inside and wait here. Kurt and I will be right back.”

Kurt followed her inside the door to the building. She put in a code and stepped into the lobby. She asked the attendant for a luggage trolley. He pulled out two. They pushed them back out to the truck and loaded everything up. Sam locked up the truck and he and Kurt pushed the trolleys inside. They stopped inside the doors.

“This is our son and his friend. They’ll need to be put on our list of allowed visitors.”

“Yes, Mrs. Hummel. I’ll need your IDs, please.”

Kurt and Sam handed him their driver’s licenses. He scanned their info and attached it to the Hummel’s apartment information.

“Thank you. When you come into the building, you’ll need to press the buzzer and show your ID. The attendant will let you in.”

“Thank you.”

They pushed the trolleys to the elevator and rode up to the fourth floor. They followed Carole to the apartment and she held the door open so they could get the trolleys in. They emptied them as quickly as possible and Kurt and Sam returned them to the attendant downstairs. They went right back upstairs.

“When will Dad be back?” Kurt and Sam were attempting to make a neat pile of what they had brought with them.

She checked her phone. “In about 2 hours. It depends on traffic.”

“Are you two hungry?”

“I’m not,” Kurt answered.

“Just thirsty, but I’ll get some water once we get this stacked a little better. I’m going to get some storage totes tomorrow.”

“It’s fine. I’m just really concerned that you’re here. Where’s Blaine?”

“I’m calling it off. I just needed to get here away from where he could find me before I let him know that.”

“Calling it off? Honey, you’re married.”
“Not technically. We didn’t go to the courthouse today. We had a wedding ceremony, but we had no marriage license. It’s not official.”

“I see.”

“Show her your phone.”

Sam opened the file on his phone and handed it to Carole.

“Read that and there’s more after that.”

Carole read while they finished rearranging their stuff in the corner of the dining room.

“How is this true?”

Sam replied, “Those are things he told me yesterday.” He took the phone back and opened Mercedes’ email and handed it back to her. “Those are the things that Mercedes found out.”

She took it and started reading. She handed Sam’s phone back to him when she had finished reading through the list.

“We’re both really tired. Would it be okay if we go take a nap in your bed? We’ll just lie on top of the covers. We have Sam’s pillows and blanket we can use.”

“Sure, honey.”

Sam grabbed his pillows and blanket out of the bag and he and Kurt followed Carole to their room.

“Just come get us when Dad gets here, okay? Sorry to fizzle out. We’ve been up since 5:00 and we drove from Indiana to Lima, packed all that stuff, took Mercedes to the airport, and then drove straight here.”

“It’s fine, honey.” She moved the pillows onto the top of the dresser, grabbed a couple of things from the closet, and left the room.

Sam put his pillows down on the bed and sat down to slip his shoes off. Kurt took his off as well, locked the bedroom door, and shut the blinds before he lay down next to Sam.

“C’mere.” Sam moved his arm and made room for Kurt to snuggle up again. It didn’t take long before Kurt was out. Sam lay still and a few minutes later, he was asleep as well.

Carole busied herself in the kitchen and made a casserole to put in the oven so that dinner would be ready when Burt got back.

Once she had it in the oven, she took the hanging clothes they had put over the chairs and hung them in the previously empty hall closet. She sat down and tried to read, but couldn’t focus. Eventually she heard a key in the doorknob, and then the door opened. Burt stepped in, closed it behind him, and locked it. He turned and stopped dead in his tracks.

“What’s all that stuff?”

“You’ll see.” She picked up the clothes she had grabbed for him off the back of a chair and handed them to him. “Just go change in the bathroom and come back and sit down on the couch.

While he was in the bathroom, Carole knocked on the bedroom door. When the knob wouldn’t turn, she said, “Burt’s here.”
Kurt and Sam got up and went out to the living room.

Burt came down the hallway and the instant he was in the living room, Kurt got up and hugged Burt for all he was worth. He spoke quietly. “Daddy, I love you and I’m so sorry.”

“What do you have to be sorry for? Where’s Blaine?”

“Not here,” Sam said with a very serious tone. “Don’t tell him where Kurt is under any circumstances. If he texts you, ignore it for now.”

“Burt, have a seat. We have a lot to talk about, it seems.”

“I see that. From the looks of that pile of stuff in the corner, it seems like we have two new residents.”

Kurt pulled his laptop out of the box and got the password from Carole and loaded the best video he had watched the morning before. He sat the laptop on the coffee table.

Burt was sitting next to Carole. “Okay, bud. What’s going on? Day before yesterday, I married you and Blaine and now you’re here with Sam. I don’t understand.”

“How about we start with this? I want you to watch this video and pay close attention to what the psychiatrist is explaining. Don’t try to apply it to anything. Just listen closely the first time.”

Thirty minutes later, the video was over and dinner was done. Sam and Carole went in the kitchen and grabbed what was needed to set the table, except the plates. Carole left the casserole dish on the stovetop. Everyone grabbed a plate, filled it, and sat down at the table to eat.

They ate in silence. When they finished, Kurt and Sam cleared the table and washed the dishes. Carole packed up the leftovers and put them in the refrigerator. Burt moved to the living room and sat on one end of the sectional. When they were finished in the kitchen, Carole sat next to Burt. Sam and Kurt sat on the other part of the sectional.

“First off, I want to apologize for keeping everything I’m going to tell you to myself. All I can say is that I did it because I thought it was the best thing to do. And the adage that hindsight is 20/20 applies here. Looking back and my analyzing my behavior in light of my recently acquired knowledge, I made the wrong choices a lot of times, but those choices were never made with the intention of hurting you. Actually, it was the exact opposite.”

“I know, Kurt. You’ve been trying to protect me since your mom died. You just naturally do whatever you can to protect the people you love and care about. It’s a really good personal trait to have, but not when you take it to the extreme and hurt yourself.”

Kurt nodded. “So, starting back in junior high, kids started making fun of me a lot more than they had in the lower grades. My voice didn’t start to change, and then I didn’t grow that much. Anyway, as high school started and the three middle schools combined, the number of bullies went up and since they had a larger support system, they got away with even more than they did in junior high. As they became adult-sized and got taller than most of the teachers, their power grew because even the teachers wouldn’t stand up to them. They provided alibis for each other continuously. Anyone who would turned them in would be met with at least two other jock witnesses that would back the story as the jock told it and with a 3-to-1 eyewitness account,
Figgins let the perpetrator go. It emboldened the jocks. Mr. Schue walked right past me standing in front of the dumpsters with two to four jocks standing with me and even greeted me by name. And as soon as he was 10 feet past the dumpster, Puck and someone else would toss me in. Mr. Schue was either a complete imbecile or he didn’t care or he was afraid of them as well. The jocks that joined Glee, they straightened up. The other jocks didn’t.” Kurt told Burt the things he had endured as quickly and detachedly as possible. And then he paused.

Both Carole and Burt looked shocked.

“Those kids tortured you!” Burt nearly yelled.

“And that is why I hid what they were doing to me from you. Calm down.”

Burt scooted back on the sofa and tried to relax.

“Dave really upped his bullying junior year. I never did tell you why he threatened to kill me. I lied to you that day in the office.”

“Why?”

“To protect him.”

“You lied to protect the thug that threatened to kill you?”

“Yes. I made some wrong choices that led to what happened. I was not at fault, per se. But my choices led to his choices. Like I said, he had been bullying me more frequently. One day, he knocked my phone out of my hand and sent it flying into the concrete block wall, and I lost my temper. I followed him to the locker room. And I followed some bad advice I had gotten from Blaine. My choice. I confronted him. I said some things that I knew would hurt him because that’s how I always fought – with my words. The last thing I said was that he couldn’t punch the gay out of me any more than I could punch the ignoramus out of him. Stupid move. I know. I thought he was going to hit me. Instead, he stepped into my personal space and grabbed me and kissed me.”

“What?” Burt stood up.

“Dad, calm down. Otherwise, I’m done sharing. This is EXACTLY why I kept everything from you. So, you can calm down or you can leave and I will keep talking to just Carole.”

“Fine. I’m calm. Go on.” He sat back down again.

“So, I freaked out of course. I told Blaine what happened. He didn’t know Dave. I felt like it was safe to tell him when I couldn’t keep it inside. He said that he would come to McKinley and we’d talk to Dave and tell him that he wasn’t alone, which seemed like a good idea. Except, that when we found him on the outside stairwell, Blaine started talking about the issue right there on the stairs.”

“Oh, God,” Carole said.

“Yeah. Needless to say, that didn’t go well. He pushed Blaine against the chain link around the stairwell and I pushed him away from Blaine. After that, the bullying became very personal. I was under so much stress that I didn’t associate what happened on the stairwell with his increasing bullying until long after the fact.”

“When did this happen?”
“About a month after your heart attack.”

“I see. So, he upped the bullying because of the confrontation on the stairwell. He was afraid that you were going to out him. So, I’m guessing that’s why he threatened to kill you.”

“He said if I told anyone else that he’d kill me. And he started being really creepy. He’d get in my personal space and just press his index finger into my chest. He swiped the cake topper I had for your wedding right out of my hands. He just said ‘thanks’ in this creepy way and put it in his letterman jacket pocket and walked off.”

“When did you make the connection?” Carole asked.

“When the Warblers backed Blaine serenading his crush at the GAP. It turned out that the guy was closeted, which I did not know ahead of time. Blaine outed him by singing to him and musically stalking him around the store. The look on his face is what made me realize. Dave was horrified of being outed. When he was outed at his new school – that was partially my fault too. He had been sending me secret admirer Valentine’s Day gifts. The last one said to meet my admirer at Breadstix. Sugar had planned a party there for that evening, so I went there expecting it to be Blaine. So, I went to Breadstix at the appointed time and it was Dave. He showed up in a gorilla suit, like the Gorilla Gram deliverers wear. He took the head off and I saw that it was him. We sat down and talked. He told me that he was in love with me. I turned him down. Can you excuse me for a minute? I’ll be right back.” Kurt left the room and headed for the bathroom.

He texted Dave.

--I’m sorry to bother you and bring this up, but I need to know one thing.

--Shoot.

--Way back in high school, when you met me at Breadstix, why did you do that when you knew I was dating Blaine?”

--He had been hanging out with Sebastian at Scandals, dancing, flirting. I never saw them doing anything beyond that, but I just figured Blaine was too reserved to go any farther in public. I thought the two of you had broken up.

--Did you ever tell Blaine about the Valentine’s Day gifts?

--Yeah. It was one of the stories I talked about the first night he and I talked at Scandals.

--Thank you for answering me. I’m really sorry about what happened. I’d like to talk to you sometime, but not right now. For now, I’ll just say that I left Blaine. I’ll email you and arrange a time to talk.

--Are you okay?

--I will be. You?

--Broken hearts heal eventually, right?

--So they say.

Kurt washed his face and went back out to the living room.
“Okay. So, he told me that he was in love with me and I turned him down as gently as I could. A jerk from his football team saw us together and told everyone that he was on a date with me on Valentine’s Day and you know the rest.”

“Yeah. Why would he do that? Risk being outed?”

“He thought I was single and he had had a crush on me since before the whole kissing me in the locker room incident. I guess he thought he was ready to come out or maybe he thought I would date him in secret. I don’t know. I didn’t ask him. But being outed and humiliated caused him to try to kill himself. His mother is still not part of his life. He wouldn’t agree to be ‘cured’. If I had outed him junior year, he wouldn’t have been 18 yet and she could have forced him into conversion therapy. I didn’t know these things. He just terrified me. I was covered in bruises and in so much pain and fear. That’s why I left and went to Dalton. It wasn’t just a little bullying. I had been putting up with a lot of bullying for quite a while, but when he freaked out and got more personal and violent, I was honestly afraid that if he could get me alone that he would rape me. Because I didn’t have all of the facts, I jumped to conclusions about what he would do. I was terrified. He was terrified. It was a mess.”

“I can see that. So, you wouldn’t tell me this because you were trying to protect me and protect him. You went to Dalton.”

“Yeah. And there instead of being bullied, I was stifled. I was told to fit in. The uniforms were the great equalizers.” Kurt told of his audition, Blaine’s non-date coffee dates, the flirty duets, and revisited the GAP attack story.

“So, you traded your safety for losing your individuality and on top of it, the boy you liked was an ass to you and to that kid he outed. And you still liked him. And then you dated him.”

“That’s where some of the stuff in the video starts to become part of the conversation. Sam and Mercedes kidnapped us after the reception. Sam can tell you more about what they talked about, but Sam went to see a counselor when he left New York last May. His counselor suggested that perhaps Blaine is a narcissist. He and Mercedes had some websites they wanted me to read. After I did, I looked up some of the words from the websites. I’m obviously not a psychiatrist, but his behavior fits the descriptions I read and match with what’s described in the videos I watched. He’s manipulative and controlling, all under the guise of his dapper prep school boy persona. No one ever saw the manipulative side besides me. He isolated me. He controlled everything about our relationship, but everyone thought he hung the moon and told me how lucky I was to have a guy like Blaine. He charmed everyone. Everyone. Sam calls it the ‘Blaine-effect’. He just manages to make everyone like him and think he’s amazing. Including me – especially me. By the time he deigned to ask me to date him, he had already worked his narcissist magic. He had dangled himself like a carrot in front of me and watched me fall hook, line, and sinker. He hurt me over and over and saw that I would stick by him. That made me the perfect mark. He only had to provide minimal positive input and I was his.”

“This seems a little far fetched,” Burt said.

“I know,” Sam said. “He has you under his spell as well. I came out from under his control this summer after getting therapy and being treated for depression.”

“I’m glad you got help, sweetie.”

“Me too. These things that Kurt is telling you are true. I’ve been witness to quite a bit of it and I let
the amazing friendship that I had with Kurt wither and I became Blaine’s bestie. When Kurt broke
up with him, I became his replacement. I was depressed and lonely and he was there to feed me
little bits of encouragement, enough to string me along and turn me into his sidekick.”

“I’m going to steer this conversation back to my senior year. I mentioned a few minutes ago that
Dave thought I was single on Valentine’s Day, which is why he sent the gifts and approached me
to date. You remember Sebastian?”

“Not really.”

“He was the lead Warbler after Blaine left Dalton. He was a transfer student from Paris. Anyway,
he’s gay and he was flirty with Blaine all the time. He and Blaine texted each other for months.
Well, Blaine had been meeting up with Sebastian for coffee and going to Scandals without me.
And like I said, Dave never saw them do anything like kiss at Scandals, but since it was just the
two of them that went, he thought they were dating and that Blaine and I had broken up.”

“Blaine and Sebastian texted and talked on the phone for months. Blaine gave Sebastian our set list
for Regionals,” Sam added.

Burt shook his head.

“So, anyway, later in the spring I met this guy, Chandler at the music store. He was really talkative
and excited. He was auditioning for NYU and I told him that I was auditioning for NYADA. We
traded phone numbers and he left in less than two minutes. A few days later, he started texting me.
Silly stuff. Cheesy pick up lines.”

“Kurt showed all of them to me. They were ridiculous. Kurt and I sat in Glee reading them and
laughing.”

“Remember when I told you that Blaine and I were on the rocks?”

Burt nodded. “That I remember.”

“The day before he had picked up my phone when it was pinging from texts when I was out of the
room and he got irate. He claimed that I was cheating on him with Chandler. I told him that I didn’t
like Chandler that way and that I wasn’t cheating. He left in a huff.”

Sam continued. “The next day in Glee, he introduced his song with ‘This is for everyone who’s
been cheated on’ and sang a very angry version of a Whitney Houston break-up song. He got
everyone to believe that Kurt had cheated on him. Everyone sided with Blaine. Well, I didn’t. I had
seen the texts. But seriously, they were some stupid jokes and stuff for a few days.”

Kurt jumped in. “And Blaine and Sebastian had texted for months. He told me that it was different
because he didn’t like Sebastian. I told him that I didn’t like Chandler. It didn’t matter. I was
guilty. The next day, I sang an apology song.”

“Kurt basically just accepted his judgment and paid his penance.”

“That’s nuts.”

“Fast-forward to me being in New York. I had been there two weeks and Blaine showed up
unexpectedly and by the end of the evening, he confessed that he had cheated on me and he blamed
me for it.”

“What? Define cheating. This same texting nonsense?” Burt asked.
“No. Regular cheating. Having sex with someone.”

“Oh, Kurt,” Carol said. “Honey, that’s awful. But how could that be your fault?”

“I wasn’t there for him. That’s what he told me.”

“So, you broke up with him because he had sex with someone else?” Burt asked.

“That’s right.”

“And then I brought him to New York for Christmas.”

“Yep. And you told him first that you had cancer. You were buddy-buddy with him watching whatever sports game that was, and you were betting with each other on how long it would take me to pick up a magazine. It was like watching you enjoy time with someone else more than me again. You thought he was great. Everyone thinks he’s great. You said you came to New York to spend the holiday with me, but then you spent the evening watching sports with him. I just rolled my eyes and said very little, like usual.”

Sam said, “He and I turned the Warblers in for doing drugs and he managed to get them to host the proposal.”

“Why did you drive me to that proposal? Why did you bring up Mom and make me feel like Blaine was my only option? You even said I looked like I was being driven to my execution. I had been casually dating a new guy in New York. I was so close to breaking free when I came back to see you, and then I was reeled back in. The guy in New York and I weren’t serious yet, but he wanted to be. He was so sweet.” Tears streamed down Kurt’s cheeks.

“You never told me he had cheated on you.”

“Shouldn’t you have just automatically have taken my side when you knew we were broken up? If you had questions about what was going on, shouldn’t you have asked rather than showing up with my ex as my Christmas gift?”

“I get it. I screwed up.”

“You know why I said ‘yes’ that day?”

“Why?”

“Because I’m not strong enough to fight against the tide like that. He had such a hold over everyone. Everyone I had ever considered to be a friend was there and you were there, smiling up at me like saying yes was the best thing I could do.”

“I thought you would love the whole thing. You were always into those movies with the huge song and dance numbers.”

“I would have loved it, IF I had already discussed the fact that I wanted to marry whoever was asking me. And I would have appreciated it if that guy had bought a matching ring for himself if he wanted me to wear one. He put a ring on my finger, but not on his.”

Sam added, “He told me that men don’t wear engagement rings”

“So, Kurt’s not a man?” Carole asked.

“Not really in Blaine’s eyes. You read those lists of things.” Sam passed his phone to Burt. “Read
that and then there’s more. After that, we’ll talk more.”

Carole leaned forward and put her hand on Kurt’s knee and squeezed it. “Honey, I had no idea.”

“I know.” He kept quiet until Burt finished.

“You can’t be serious about some of this stuff.”

Sam said, “I swear to you, he told me those things himself yesterday.”

“So, he never helped out with the expenses in New York?”

Kurt shook his head. “Well, sometimes he’d buy some groceries or pay for a meal out.”

Sam reached out for the phone, took it, and switched to the other list. “Mercedes got this information out of him.”

Burt took it back and went back to reading. “This is nuts. I don’t understand the stuff about David. Who is David?”

“Dave, David – same person. David Karofsky. I should have told you some other things before you read those lists. Last May, Blaine moved back into the loft with me when Rachel left for LA.”

“Stop,” Burt interrupted. “When did he move out of the loft because that’s where I thought he lived the whole time he was in New York.”

“He and Sam moved in with me and Rachel. It wasn’t working out. When Mercedes came to New York, Sam moved in with her. Not long after that, Blaine and I decided that we would be better off living apart. He went and lived with them. He moved back into the loft when Rachel left to go to LA. He and I split up within a matter of weeks. When I finally got up the nerve to tell you that I had called off the summer wedding, he had moved out about a month before that. He went back to Ohio and started dating Dave.”

“The one that he nearly outed and who then threatened to kill you? And then later, thought you were single, sent you a bunch of gifts, got outed, and tried to kill himself? That Dave?”

“The one and only.”

Burt shook his head, not being able to make sense of what Kurt was saying.

“I went to therapy over the summer, but I figured out this weekend that the therapist I went to was useless and actually made things worse. But anyway, I sold off all of the furniture in the loft because the Berrys obviously weren’t going to continue to pay half of the rent when the lease was set to renew at the beginning of September. So, I moved to a dorm. But I was so lonely. I came back. I came back to get Blaine back. When I got to Lima and found out that he was dating Dave, I dropped it. Rachel begged me to help her with Glee. I admit that it felt good to be needed and wanted and not completely alone. I had spent the whole summer in New York in that huge loft alone, working my butt off and taking a dance class and a voice class to finally be completely caught up. Blaine had chased off the few friends I had made and some had moved out of the city already. Living with someone I didn’t know in a small space. I don’t know … I just wanted what I knew and what I was used to.”

“So, if you gave up on the idea of getting him back, how did you end up back together?”

“Stupidity, obviously.”
Sam spoke up. “You’re not stupid, Kurt. You’ve been emotionally abused for years and that abuse takes its toll on people and drives them back into the arms of their abusers.”

“I hate that word because it doesn’t seem right for someone who didn’t physically attack me.”

“Kurt,” Sam said very seriously. “You know that’s not true. I know of at least one incident.”

Kurt closed his eyes. He couldn’t hold back the tears. “Anyway, he broke up with Dave this past week. He and I got back together the middle of the week.”

“So, you had been broken up after he cheated on you for … how long?”

“Six months.”

“And this time?”

“Five months.”

Burt spent a few minutes thinking. “You dated 18 months, split for 6. Dated again for 13 months, split for 5. So you’ve date for 2.5 years and been split up for nearly a year in the last 3.5 years.”

“Yes.”

Carole was the one to speak this time. “And you agreed to marry him when you had been back together with him for a couple of days after being broken up for 5 months, during which time he had been in a steady relationship with someone else?”

“Yes.”

“You need help, honey.”

“I know. That’s why I’m here. Mercedes and Sam took us to separate hotels after the ceremony. The two of them talked some sense into me. Blaine won’t admit that any of those things are problematic and from what the two of them said, he didn’t seem inclined to share or hide them, but I’m sure that when confronted he would have lied to me or twisted the truth about them. He kept telling Sam that his questions didn’t matter because he and I were already married.”

“Honey, you and Sam can stay here until you get this figured out. I know that Sam will probably have to go back to Lima in a few days when he runs out of sick days.”

“No, I quit. I emailed in my resignation and told Coach Beiste I wasn’t coming back. I’ll mail the key to my apartment to Coach Sue at the school when we go out tomorrow. I was already being drawn back into the crazy. I need to get away from there.”

“Fine. You can both stay here until you figure out what you want to do. Somehow can both sleep on the couch for tonight. We can come up with some way to get you some privacy, provided you’re okay sleeping in the same bed.”

“It’s fine. We did last night. We’ve done it before for Glee trips. Sam was always the only one willing to share a bed with me.”

“We can talk about a bed again tomorrow,” Carole said.

“I’m going to work on shutting down all of my social media and blocking Blaine from emailing or calling me. If he contacts either of you, please just tell him that you know that I’m safe, but don’t give him anymore than that and then don’t answer any more of his calls. I mean that, Dad. I know
he’s got you under his spell. If you give my location away to him, Sam and I will vanish and that’s a promise.”

“I won’t tell him,” Burt said. “I want you to send me more information on what his problem is.”

“I can do that, but I’m sure my social media is blowing up by now because I was supposed to call him when I got back to Lima from taking Mercedes to the airport, which would have been around 2:00, which was 6 hours ago. And instead, I powered my phone down.”

“Just send me all the stuff you want us to read. I’ll get my laptop and Burt and I can sit at the table and read everything together.”

Kurt sent the articles first, and then signed on to all of his social media accounts. Blaine had already posted to his Facebook page, tagging all of their mutual friends. And he had umpteen private messages from people. He quickly set his settings to offline to keep people from being able to see him.

“Kurt, stop. Don’t deactivate your account until you take screen shots of his posts and his private messages. Once he realizes what’s going on, he may delete them and attempt to gaslight you.”

Kurt took screen shots quickly.

“Hey Carole, can you please open Facebook and let me post that ‘Kurt is safe and sound and that no one needs to worry.’ from your account before I deactivate my account?”

“Sure, honey.” She loaded Facebook.

Kurt walked over to the table and went to his wall and responded to the post that Blaine had made using Carole’s account, tagging everyone that Blaine had originally tagged so that everyone would see the response.

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Leaving him hanging for 6 hours wasn’t very kind,” Burt said. “Since he had no idea what was going on, I’m sure he was legitimately worried that you had been in an accident.”

“That’s true. It wasn’t nice, but I didn’t know what to say to him yet. And he’s stood me up for longer than 6 hours before. He’s stood me up or been late so many times that I could vanish for a couple of days and still not be even on the amount of time I’ve sat around waiting on him to show up.”

“Wow,” Carole said. “There’s a lot more to this, isn’t there.”

Sam replied from across the room. “You have NO idea.”

Kurt went back to the couch and deactivated his Facebook account. He deleted his other social media accounts since he rarely posted anything anyway. He mostly used the accounts to keep up with what other people were doing.

“Now to the hard part.”

Sam scooted closer. He put his hand on Kurt’s shoulder. “You can do this.”
He started a text to Blaine, but stopped. “I can’t break up with him via text. I at least need to call him.”

“Honey, we’ll go in the bedroom and give you some privacy.”

“Do you want me to stay or step in the kitchen and listen to music or something?” Sam asked.

“Just go grab our shoes and stuff from the bedroom and come back out here, please.”

“Sure.”

Sam came back with his pillows and blanket. He tossed them on the other side of the sectional and sat back down next to Kurt. After Sam returned, Carole and Burt went to their bedroom and stayed.

Kurt dialed Blaine’s number.

“Kurt? I’ve been so worried. Are you okay? You should have been back hours ago. I thought maybe your phone died since you probably didn’t have a charger with you.”

“Blaine… Blaine. I’m fine. I’m not in any danger.”

“I’m sitting in the Lima Bean. I’ve been here for ages. Are you finally back in town?”

“No. Actually I’m not. And I won’t be. We jumped ahead when we shouldn’t have. I’m not ready to be married. I’m actually not ready to be in any type of relationship with you right now. I need to focus on school.”

“We’re married. You can’t just break up with me.”

“We’re not legally married Blaine. We participated in a ceremony, but there were no legal documents. The license has to be issued ahead of time and it has be signed by the officiant. We didn’t have a license.”

“You’re breaking up with me then? I don’t understand.”

“There’s nothing really to understand. I can’t be in a relationship with you.”

“Sam poisoned your mind against me. He’s just jealous because you have me and he doesn’t anymore.”

“Well, even if that’s the case, I’m still not going to be in a relationship with you.”

“What will we tell our friends? They were all there and saw the whole thing. Even my mom.”

“Just tell them that I got cold feet and like the *Runaway Bride*.”

“I liked it better when you said you were going to be Sally.”

“Well, times change and people change. We’re not those 17-year old boys anymore. Our goals are different and I need to keep working on me. I’m hanging up now. I wish you the best.”

Kurt hung up before Blaine could say anything else. As soon as he disconnected, he blocked Blaine’s number.

Sam stood up and offered to pull Kurt up. “Get up and get some pajamas and go shower. I’ll lay the blankets and pillows out so we can sleep.”
Kurt allowed himself to be pulled to standing. He grabbed what he needed from his suitcases and headed into the bathroom. When he came back out, the sectional had been made up with sheets so they could sleep. Sam grabbed his own stuff and went to the bathroom. While he was gone, Kurt played another short video on how to survive breaking up with a narcissist. When Sam came back, Kurt looked up from where he was just staring at the screen.

“There’s a washer and dryer off the kitchen. We should probably do some laundry.”

“Good idea. I’ll go toss what I can into the washer and get started. Why don’t you figure out the best place to get those books you need and the closest place between here and there to buy some storage totes?”

Kurt got directions and saved them. He could hear Sam talking on his phone, but he couldn’t hear what he was saying. He plopped down on the other side of the sectional when he came back in the room.

“I told my parents that I wasn’t in Lima and that I was safe and to not be concerned about anything they might see online.”

“Were they freaked out?”

“No. They’re not friends with any of my friends. Plus, I’ve been fairly unpredictable the last few years. I think they’re used to it by now. They really just care that I’m safe. I don’t think Blaine would resort to contacting them, but I didn’t want them to worry, just in case. If you want, you can go ahead and lie down to sleep. I’m going to charge my phone somewhere and maybe play my guitar, if that won’t bother you.”

“Actually I’d like that.”
The next morning, Kurt woke up before everyone else. He carried the trash bag that had his laundry in it into the laundry room, sorted it, and started a load.

While it was washing, he looked through the cabinets and refrigerator and found what he needed to make French toast. He got everything ready and pre-heated the oven to its lowest setting. He made enough French toast for everyone and put it in the oven to keep it warm.

He hung some of his clothes up and tossed the rest in the dryer and started a new load.

He went back to cooking and made a dozen scrambled eggs to share between them. By the time the eggs were done, Burt and Carole had come out to the kitchen.

“Grab a plate and help yourselves. There’s French toast in the oven.” He stepped out of the narrow kitchen to give them room to serve themselves and he walked over to Sam and gently woke him up. “I made breakfast.”

“Oh. Thanks.” He sat up and followed Kurt to the kitchen.

After they had gotten their food, they sat down with Burt and Carole and ate.

“So, what are your plans for today?” Carole asked.

“Well, what I didn’t tell you last night is that I withdrew from my internship course and instead I enrolled in two 2nd 8-weeks online courses. So, I need to go buy the books I need for those classes. And we’re going to stop and get some storage totes on the way back for our clothes and stuff. We left in a huge hurry. And I really need to go to New York before the month is over and pull the rest of my stuff out of storage.”

“Well, there’s a huge walk-in closet that we barely use since we go back and forth and most of our stuff is at home. You can bring your stuff back and store it in there until you figure out what you’re doing.”

“Thanks, Carole. I just need to figure out how to get there and get the stuff.”

“Well, thanks for breakfast, kiddo. I gotta get going.” He kissed Carole on the cheek and left.

Carole said, “Would it be okay if I go with you two this morning? I need to get some stuff and taking a taxi is ridiculously expensive and while I don’t mind the buses or the subway, doing actual shopping that way is hard.”

“Not a problem at all.” He went over to the coffee table and brought his phone back. “Those are the two places we were planning to go, but we can stop other places if you need to.”

“I’d like to go to Costco. It’s right here.” She showed him the location.

The dryer buzzed and Kurt went to pull his clothes out and fold them up. He mentally added buying a couple of packs of hangers to his list.

“Maybe we could rent a bed for two months,” Kurt suggested.

“Burt and I actually talked about it and as long as you’re okay with it, we’re going to get one of
those really nice double-thick inflatable beds. That way if you can take it with you when you leave and use it until you can get a real bed or it can be used it for guests or whatever.”

“That’s an even better idea. I just didn’t want you to have to actually purchase a bed because I know how expensive they are. It was hard letting mine go. It was hard letting all of it go. I put a lot of effort into finding the stuff we had in the loft. Anyway, you can go get ready and we’ll get ready too.”

Kurt opened the coat closet and looked at the interior. “I think we could buy two of those plastic drawer units and keep our stuff from our dressers in them. We could fold our pants and put them on the shelf above and hang our shirts up.”

“That would work,” Carole said. “Then you could hang the stuff you won’t be wearing right now in the walk-in closet and you can store the rest of your shoes and whatever you need to leave in totes in there as well.”

“I’m going to go look at the closet layout before we leave.”

They revised their original shopping plan and went to the bookstore and then to Costco since Carole told them that Costco would have the things they were looking for. When they got there, Sam and Kurt took their own cart to go look for storage totes while Carole went to the food area.

“I need to go to New York. I need to talk to Madame Tibideaux in person. And I need to get my stuff out of storage. Will you go with me? I’ll pay for the gas in your truck. Or if you’d rather, I can pay to rent a car. I just really don’t want to drive four hours each way in one day alone.”

“I’ll go and we can take my truck. You can pay for the gas, if it will make you feel better. I owe you a few thousand dollars though, so I really don’t need you to cover the gas.”

“How about these? There are half-sized ones that can still stack neatly with them.”

“Those are fine.” They each grabbed what they thought they’d need and Kurt found the hangers. Sam put two of the plastic drawer units inside the storage totes and moved the half-sized ones to the underneath of the cart. They met up near the registers so that Kurt and Sam could make their purchases with Carole’s member card. After they had all paid, they stopped in the snack bar and ate lunch before they drove back to the apartment.

Once they had everything in the apartment, Kurt went into the bedroom and closed the door and called NYADA to set up an appointment to meet with Madame Tibideaux. He was offered Thursday at 2:00 and he accepted. When he came out, he saw that Sam had returned to doing his laundry and he had emptied all of the other stuff he had out on to the dining table and the all of the chairs in the dining room.

Kurt grabbed his stuff and took it into the living room area and began folding up the short-sleeve shirts that he had brought with him and stacking them neatly into one of the totes. He took the labels and tape off of one of the drawer units and started putting his socks, tanks, underwear, and pajamas in it. Once he was done, he put it in the right side of the coat closet. He sorted through the clothes that Carole had already hung in the closet and pulled out the short-sleeved shirts and folded and stored them as well.
“I didn’t realize that I had grabbed these,” Kurt said, pulling out two vests. He looked at both of them and decided he’d be more likely to wear the dark olive one since it matched his brown and olive boots. “Here, try this on.” He tossed a blue quilted puffer vest to Sam.

He put it on. “This fits.”

“It’s yours.”

“Thanks. I’m sure it will be handy since I don’t wear my letterman jacket anymore.”

“It’s from my butch period in 10th grade.” He slipped the one in his hands on and went to look in the mirror in the bathroom and came back out. “It looks a lot better on me now than it did then. For one thing, I’m bigger so it fits better, but I also don’t look like I’m trying so hard anymore. I finally don’t look 12.”

“You’ve never looked 12 since I’ve known you.”

Kurt just ignored him and put the dark olive vest back in the closet. “Do you want your short sleeved shirts out of here to fold up?”

“Umm. Yeah. I don’t really need those hanging since it’s going to get cold soon.”

Kurt removed them and put them over the back of a chair. “I got an appointment for Thursday afternoon. I hope that’s okay.”

“It’s fine. I don’t have any plans other than I need to go out and find a job if we’re staying here for a while. I’m not mooching. I have enough saved up for a while to cover my part of the groceries and cover my phone and my insurance on my truck. But a job is my next priority.”

“I need to get one too, at least enough to cover food and my phone. Those two classes are going to be a lot of work though. The workload will be like taking 6 academic classes at once. And I haven’t done that since Dalton. And these are college classes.”

They chit-chatted and worked until they had gotten everything settled. Kurt put his all of their totes in the walk-in closet, including the empty ones awaiting the rest of the stuff he’d bring back later in the week.

Once all of the clothing and their personal items had been dealt with, they opened the box that held the air mattress they had gotten at Costco. They moved the dining table closer to the living area and set the mattress up in the corner where they had stacked their stuff the night before.

They inflated it and when Sam’s bed linens buzzed in the dryer, Kurt grabbed them, and made the bed while Sam moved the comforter and throw pillows to the dryer.

“I don’t think we’ll need the blanket for now.” Kurt folded it and put it on the table. “Let’s try it out to see if we’ve inflated it enough.”

They both lay down.

“Seems fine to me,” Sam said.

“Are you really okay with all of this? I feel like you’ve been pulled into my drama. You know that you don’t have to stay with me, not that I don’t want you to because I’ve always enjoyed your
company, but I don’t want you to feel obligated to stay just because you made some bad choices. Obviously, I’m the king of bad choices, but I don’t want you to feel like you’ve traded one manipulator for another.”

“You’re not manipulative, so stop thinking that way. You always helped me with no thought of getting something in return. And I’m not staying because I feel obligated. I feel comfortable with you and your parents and I need to figure my life out. We can figure our lives out together for now. If our future paths veer away from each other, we’ll deal with that later.”

“Okay.”

“Now, that we’ve got this under control, I think I’m going to go out and take a walk in about a 4-block radius and just look around. Sitting cooped in an apartment all day is a recipe for moping, not thinking. I think better when I move.”

“If I promise not to talk so you can still think, can I come with you? I could use some air too.”

“Sure. Let’s go.”

They let Carole know that they were going out for a while.

When they got back, Kurt signed into his new classes and downloaded the syllabi.

“You can watch a movie while I do my homework, if you want.”

Sam was staring off into space. “Oh, um. Sure.” Sam grabbed the remote and search Netflix for something to watch, got comfortable on the sofa, and started a movie.

Kurt plopped in the corner of the sectional, put his earPods in and started a study playlist of classical music, criss-crossed his legs, opened his thick history textbook in his lap, and got busy reading. After he finished, he read the first short story assigned on the French class syllabus. By then the movie had ended and Sam had started another one. Kurt took his laptop to the table and began to work on the assignments.

Once Burt had come home and changed clothes, Kurt moved to the sitting chair in the bedroom so he could keep working while everyone could be free to talk or watch TV. When dinner was done, Carole came to get him.

“Are you doing okay?”

“I’m alright. I just have a lot of work. I had put some of it off when I was helping Brittany and Santana with the barn decorating. And picking up the two new classes will keep me busy for sure. I haven’t had the equivalent of this much textbook work since I was at Dalton. At NYADA, my classes are a mix of textbook/lecture-based classes, and hands-on classes like voice and dance.”

“I figured as much.”

“We’re driving to New York Thursday, so I’m trying to do a lot of work today and tomorrow to make sure that I stay caught up with being gone the whole day Thursday and then organizing what I bring back during the day on Friday. I’m not imagining a positive outcome with my meeting with Madame Tibideaux. I won’t be surprised if she allows me to stay enrolled for the semester, but
then washes me out at the semester break.”

“Why would she do that, honey?”

“She’s not exactly flexible. I had the perfect internship set up and then I changed it to stay in Lima. She reluctantly agreed, but when she sees that I withdrew and dropped to 12 hours, she will not be pleased. I’m not sure what I want anymore. I can’t imagine living in New York with Blaine at NYU. It’s a huge city, but NYU is only about a mile and a half from NYADA – a 15-minute walk. NYADA is not a big place and he will be able to find me easily. I don’t know if I can be ready to face seeing him whenever he wants to find me two months from now.”

“That would be hard to deal with. But for now, come eat. I told them to start, but you know your dad.”

Kurt smiled and got up and went to eat with everyone. As soon as he finished, he returned to the bedroom to keep working.

Later that evening after Kurt and Sam were in bed, Kurt picked up his phone and showed Sam a website.

“What would you think of one of these? I’d be willing to order one for us if you think you’d be able to sleep in one. It would give us the privacy of being able to sleep without people watching us.”

“That is actually awesome. I’ve seen them for twin beds, but I didn’t know you could get ones for queen sized beds. Which one do you like?”

“I actually like this dark one. It’s black with those purple and dark teal splotches. I like the inside being white and the outside being dark.”

“That’s actually the one I liked and that one.” Sam pointed. “But I think you’re right. I would like a white interior better as well.”

“Well, then I’m going to consider ordering one after we figure out what we’re doing.”

“Good plan.”

“Where is all of your artwork?”

“I took it to my parents’ place right after graduation. I didn’t want to get rid of it, but having it with me wasn’t an option. Whenever I figure out where I’m going to stay, I’ll get it back somehow.”

Kurt nodded. He got up and turned the living room lamp off and used the light of his phone to make it back to the bed. “I’m glad you want to stay for a while. I had forgotten how easy it was to be around you. You just let me be me.”

“And I let myself forget the same thing.”

“I’m going to work on schoolwork again all day tomorrow. I’m sorry I won’t have much time to do anything else until we get back. Maybe you can plan sightseeing trips while I’m busy working.”

“I looked a few things up today. All of the museums are free. Just tell me what to plan and I’ll do it. You know, like what days and how long each day.”
“I’ll think about it.”

Kurt turned on his side with his back to Sam to go to sleep. “Good night.”

“’Night.”

The next morning Kurt got up, but was still tired. He drank some coffee hoping that it would help. Carole invited them to go for a walk with her. Kurt turned her down, but asked her if she could print a few things for him while she was out. Sam went with her.

Kurt decided to tackle his text messages, at least some of them. He scrolled through the list. He saw that Dave had texted him the day before. He opened it and responded.

--Kurt, I won’t bother you, but are you really okay? Things here are nuts.
--Yes, I assure you that I am safe and sound. No need to worry. I’ll email you soon.

He moved on through the list. There was one from an unknown number. He decided to open it and deal with it, even if it was just blocking the number after looking at it

--Kurt – This is Sebastian. If you’re in New York, be warned that the grape vine has let it be known that Blaine will be here this weekend looking around for you.
--Why do you care?

Sebastian replied immediately.

--Now, now. I thought we had a civil truce.
--That was to watch you humiliate him, but then you said yes.

Kurt dialed the number.

“That didn’t make any sense.”

“Sure it did.”

“Explain.”

“He got us disqualified from Regionals when the vast majority of us didn’t even take any steroids. We had to scramble to keep our Ivy League acceptances. Our fathers had to intervene. I agreed for us to help him only because I thought you’d say no and publicly humiliate him. Trent was the one trying to be nice.”

“What happened to turning over a new leaf?”

“Well, that was for unmerited meanness not for people who actually did something to all of us. He also tarnished the school’s reputation. And then I just found out that HE’S the person the school hired to be the consultant for the group this year to make sure there’s no more doping scandals.”
“Why did you text me to warn me?”

“You finally wised up and broke free last spring, then you followed him back to that God-awful town, and somehow ended up marrying him. But then I heard you vanished. He’s been looking for you everywhere.”

“I’m so lost Sebastian. You are not making any sense. He was your target. You pursued him relentlessly. You tried to blind me, although I have no idea how that would have helped you win him over. I know that the two of you were spending time together, despite the fact that I asked him to stay away from you.”

“The slushie was meant to mess up whatever over-the-top Michael Jackson-esque outfit you would inevitably wear to the Jackson-off that night. And I never wanted him after the first 10 minutes I spent with him. He was cute, but no thanks. Wittering whinging weasels aren’t my type.”

“Wait, what does that even mean?”

“I miss using British slang. Wittering means going on and on about insignificant stuff. In this case, how many solos he wasn’t getting. Whinging means whining like a child about said lack of solos and about the members of the New Directions. And weasel, I figure you know that that means – a sneaky liar. Of course, I didn’t know about the lying part right away. That took some time to figure out. All of them together equal narcissist to me.”

“What was all of that my senior year about then?”

“It was about me being a juvenile jackass who was so jealous of you that I couldn’t see straight. It was about me lashing out at you because I hated my own life so much that I needed a target at which to vent my verbal vitriol. And you were perfect. You walked up to me that day in the Lima Bean and your eyes were fire. You were fun to aggravate. You fought back. I acted like I wanted Blaine. I didn’t. I wanted what you had. I was a jealous jackass.”

“Jealous?”

“Your dad’s television ads played frequently enough that I saw them when I was at my father’s place on the weekends that I was required to be at his house. I heard my father rant about how your dad should never be elected – how anyone who was proud to be the father of a rainbow flag-toting fag didn’t belong in Congress. And I was so jealous. Your dad knew that you were gay and he was proud of you. He loved you. He was supportive of your choice to go into the arts. He backed you and your love of Broadway enough to run for office to keep people from taking the arts away from kids.”

“Okay. But why be mean to me? You probably have no idea how much that venting you did for fun actually hurt me.”

“Hurt you?” Sebastian sounded genuinely confused. “You fought back. It was a game. I never really hated you. You were fun to argue with.”

“You have no idea about my life. You have no idea what I’ve been through. What my dad went through because of me. And you became part of my ongoing misery. Just when the bullying had finally died down at McKinley, you showed up and bullied me. You were the second out gay teen I had ever met. Blaine being the first. And I was too gay. I was too flamboyant for even a gay teen to want to be my friend.”

“I’m sorry, Kurt.” His voice was full of remorse, but he still sounded confused. “You seemed
untouchable, unflappable. You wore what you liked. You had a whole band of merry misfit friends. You had a boyfriend. You had a dad who loved you. The Warblers all talked about how amazing you were. Smart, kind, and helpful.”

“But yet, you got them to agree to slushie me.”

“This is … not what I expected. I want to talk more, but I have to go to class.”

“Do not tell anyone we talked or I will block you permanently. I appreciate the heads-up. I’m not currently in New York City. I have to come on Thursday to meet with the dean of my department. I could meet you somewhere, if you really want to talk more. My appointment is at 2:00. But if Blaine gets word from you that I’m there, I will never speak to you again.”

“I won’t say anything to anyone. You could come to my apartment. I doubt he’d look for you there.”

“We’re driving, so we’ll have to be able to park somehow.”

“There are visitor’s spots. I’ll text you the address later and we’ll make arrangements.”

“I won’t be alone. Sam is with me.”

“That’s fine.”

“I do appreciate the warning.”

“No problem.”

Kurt went back to the text messages. He got a piece of paper and wrote down each person who had texted him. He created a single outgoing message and sent it to everyone, with the exception of Isabelle since he did not want her to worry. He was angry that someone had the nerve to bother her about this.

--This is a response to everyone who has texted me in the last few days. I have not read any of your texts, nor will I. I want to thank you for your concern about my well-being. I am safe and sound. I am taking a sabbatical from modern technological communication. I am focusing on my schoolwork. Texts and voicemail messages will not be read or listened to. If you have an actual emergency, please contact someone who can actually help you. Anyone who refuses to comply with my request for some time to myself will be blocked.

He read over his response several times, decided that it was acceptable, and hit send. He wondered who would be the first to get blocked.

He moved on to his voicemail and deleted each message as soon as a voice could be identified. He deleted all of the ones that he figured had to do with him leaving Blaine without listening past the first word or two.

He actually read Isabelle’s text and realized that it had nothing to do with Blaine or the wedding. He told her to feel free to call whenever she had time to talk.

He sent Dave a short email, and then he went back to his schoolwork, leaving his email inbox to deal with later.
Sam and Carole came back with subs for lunch. He saved his assignment, closed his laptop, and moved it out of the way. She placed the sack with the printouts he had asked for and the flash drive on top of his laptop. He thanked her.

When they finished eating, Kurt went back to doing his schoolwork on his laptop. Sam sat on the couch and played his guitar while Carole pulled out a knitting bag and started working on a scarf. Later, Kurt let Sam use the laptop to do some sightseeing planning while he sat on the couch and read his history and French assignments.

After dinner, Kurt and Sam went to bed early so they could leave at 6:30 the next morning.

Sebastian was waiting for them outside the parking garage. He slid in next to Kurt and showed them where to park. He took them into the building with him and checked them in at the desk. They took the elevator up to the top floor.

“You live penthouse in Manhattan and you’re 19 years old?”

“21. And it’s not a penthouse. It’s just an apartment on the top floor.”

Kurt rolled his eyes. “Close enough.”

They followed Sebastian into his apartment.

Kurt looked around. The door opened to the right against a long closet. Directly in front of where they were standing was the dining room with a dark wood table, with chairs to seat six. In the center was a small clear vase holding a small bouquet of orange gerbera daisies. Along the right edge of the dining room was a closet identical to the one that the door opened back on. Two tall narrow windows filled most of the space on the dining room wall.

Three narrow, nearly ceiling to counter top windows filled the back wall in the U-shaped kitchen, which was in the back left corner. A half-wall separated the countertop from the living area, which was in the left front corner.

There was an L-shaped dark brown leather sectional that ran along the far left wall and the half-wall. Between the end of the left end of the sectional and the front wall, there was low, dark wood bookcase a lamp and another small vase of flowers. A long, low, dark wood entertainment cabinet was against the front wall the door was on. It had a TV sitting on it.

The walls were painted a very pale yellow color, which gave the room a lovely warm feel to it. The floors were a medium-stain hardwood. A colorful, yet muted, geometric area rug covered the floor in the open section between the sectional and the TV cabinet.

“It’s lovely,” Kurt said.

“Thank you. I decorated it myself.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really. Would you like something to drink?”

“Sure. Anything’s fine.”

“Follow me.” Sebastian got some glasses off the open shelving along the short side of the kitchen
and opened the fridge.

“Orange juice would be great, thanks,” Kurt said.

“Water’s fine for me,” Sam said.

Sebastian pulled the orange juice out, poured it into the glass, and put the carton back in the fridge. He closed the door and picked up one of the empty glasses. “It’s filtered. Ice?”

“No, thanks.”

He pressed the button on the water dispenser on the front of the refrigerator, filled the glass, and then handed it to Sam. He filled a glass for himself as well. “Bring your drinks and we’ll sit and talk.”

Kurt and Sam followed him into the living room and sat down on the sectional next to each other. Sebastian sat on the other side of the sectional near the bookcase, and angled himself facing them.

After a couple of minutes of silence, Kurt spoke up. “I only have two hours, Sebastian. If you want us to talk, you’re going to have to say something.”

“Right. So, I’ve spent the last two days going over what went on between us, trying to figure out how to start. I’ve decided that I’m going to share with the two of you things that no one knows about me in a good-faith gesture to move past our past.”

“Okay. Sam and I won’t repeat what you say to anyone unless you say we can at some point in the future.”

“So, to start. A brief history – my name is Sebastian Fontenay Smythe. Fontenay is my mother’s family name. I’m 21. I was born in Columbus, Ohio on July 23, 1993. My mother was French. My father is American. I lived in Columbus until I was 8 and my father had his third affair that my mother knew of and she left him. She took me back to Paris and we moved in with my grandparents. I lived in Paris until I was 17 when my mother was killed in a car/pedestrian accident and I was forced back to the Ohio to live with my father in early July.”

Kurt cut in. “I’m sorry to hear about your mother. That’s really sad. My mom died when I was 8.”

Sebastian nodded. “Thanks. I’m sorry to hear about your mom too. I didn’t know.”

Kurt nodded. “Go on, please.”

“I begged my father to let me stay with my grandparents, but based on custody documents my parents signed when they divorced, she had sole physical custody, but if anything ever happened to her, I had to live with him until I graduated from high school. Obviously I didn’t get my way and I was sent to Ohio. I was forced to move in with my father and his current wife. But of course, he didn’t actually want me to live with him full time, so he enrolled me as a boarding student at Dalton. It would have been my last year in high school in France, but I hadn’t been in an IB program, so I couldn’t complete the IB program at Dalton and I didn’t have a lot of the required courses for a regular Ohio diploma.”

“I repeated my senior year,” Sam said. “Not on my recommended list.”

“Yeah, me neither.” Sebastian continued. “My father hates gay people. I take that back. He dislikes pretty much everyone besides cisgender, Caucasian, good-looking, rich people.”
“Great,” Kurt said sarcastically.

“So, I hated it in Ohio. I had heard the Warblers talk about how kind and helpful you were. How talented you were. Blah, blah, blah. Blaine came to brag about West Side Story. I figured you must have been too busy with other stuff to have auditioned. You and I met at the Lima Bean. You were so full of yourself, not in a bad way, but you came across as so in-control and confident. And you rose to my challenge. We went out, you were boring most of the time, but still decent. But razzing you was so much fun to watch you keep control when I knew you wanted to strangle me. I had seen your dad’s Congressional ads on TV when I was at my father’s house on enforced weekends at home. I looked him up. He was a small town guy who loved his kid so much it oozed off of him. I was instantly jealous. I upped the jabs, but you always rose to the occasion and hit me back. It seemed like a fair fight. I was stifled at Dalton. It was nothing like my school in Paris. I liked singing and performing, but the rest was just a dreadful bore and time-consuming. I was miserable and I was jealous.”

“Let me cut in, if you don’t mind. I’ll start the way you did. My name is Kurt Eli Hummel. I have many times told people that my middle name is Elizabeth, but it is not. Elizabeth was my mother’s name. Eli was the shortened version they chose for my middle name. I was born May 27, 1993 in Lima. My mother died from cancer when I was 8. I repeated 3rd grade because I refused to do anything besides sit in my chair for several months after she died and the school flunked me. Over the summer, my dad made me understand that I would stay in the 3rd grade forever if I didn’t do my schoolwork. Putting me back a grade was like going to a new school. I didn’t know anyone in my class, and I honestly didn’t put forth any effort to change that. By then I was already into ‘girly’ things like sewing and cooking. My dad could burn water and I wanted to eat. I learned. I took over my mother’s household duties. I was not like everyone else. I already knew I was gay. And the boys knew I was different and they refused to interact with me. By junior high, the boys had learned a whole new range of words to call me, but I ignored them. It didn’t make them stop. By high school the bullies had gotten big enough that they weren’t afraid of the teachers anymore and just did as they pleased and provided alibis for each other and never got in trouble for what they did. And despite being older than most everyone in my grade, I was still small. By the time we met, I had grown, but I was already 18 then. Obviously, my voice never deepened. I was given innumerable swirlies, had countless slushies tossed at me, I was tripped, shoved into lockers, tossed in dumpsters, locked in a port-a-potty, had pee balloons thrown at me, and our lawn furniture was-nailed to our roof. I went to Dalton in November of my junior year because Dave inadvertently outed himself to me. And after he found out that I had told Blaine, he threatened to kill me if I told anyone else. I would have never told anyone at McKinley. But I was afraid. My dad had just had a heart attack and had been in a coma a few weeks before that. I couldn’t tell him. Anyway, I left McKinley because Dave was allowed back after a 3-day suspension because his parents appealed to the school board. We couldn’t afford Dalton. That spring after Regionals, Santana figured out that Dave was gay and threatened to out him if he didn’t join an anti-bullying group so I could go back to McKinley. I went back. Blaine and I started dating right before I left Dalton. Dave protected me in the hallways and walked me from class to class. I hated it. But it was better than my dad spending money we couldn’t afford. It wasn’t a great solution. The hate didn’t stop. It just went under the radar. I was voted Prom Queen. Dave was voted Prom King. He freaked out. He thought somehow that someone else knew that he was gay. I didn’t see him after Prom. He was at a new school the next fall, which was the same fall you came to Ohio. Blaine was gone to Six Flags all summer. He came back and enrolled at McKinley. He stole Tony from me after he agreed that he wouldn’t audition because I needed it for my college application and he was a junior. Then I met you. As I said on the phone, you were the second out gay teen I had met. And you came at me with guns loaded. Every guy I knew, except Sam, treated me like a girl or bullied me. And you treated me terribly. I had a dad that loved me, a fairly new stepmother, and stepbrother, Finn, who was still slightly homophobic at that point. And I had a boyfriend who was
emotionally abusive, but I didn’t know that because I didn’t have any experience with healthy relationships. Other than being friends with Sam, I had never had anyone who just accepted me for myself. And he and Blaine didn’t get along. And Sam had left at the end of my junior year. So, when you came along, the bullying at school had finally died down. Blaine was, well, Blaine. He had taken Tony, like I said. The two directing teachers and Artie thought I was too feminine to play Tony, so they just flat out asked Blaine to play Tony at his audition and he read for the part. I played the role of supportive boyfriend. Rachel was running against me for Class President, something I had hoped would help me get into college. Something she didn’t need because she had a full CV unlike me. My boyfriend took the role I needed and my supposed best friend was trying to take the student government role I needed. You attacked me constantly. God, I can’t talk about this part right now. Go back to talking about yourself for a few minutes.”

“I had no idea about any of that stuff, Kurt. I swear. None of the guys at Dalton ever said anything other than you had come for a while because of a bully. No one said anything about a death threat or what you had been through.”

“That’s because I never TOLD any of them about it. I never talked to anyone about it. My dad didn’t know. Well, obviously he knew about the lawn furniture, but I never told him about the other stuff. When he pushed, I’d just say that the guys at school harassed me sometimes, but I played it down. It wasn’t his fault I was gay. He was a great dad. He didn’t need to know.”

“And about going out with Blaine to Scandals and to get coffee – he said that he invited you and you were working when we were going out for coffee and that you didn’t mind him going to Scandals with me, but you couldn’t go anymore because you didn’t want to risk getting caught there after your dad was elected. I had no idea that you didn’t know. If I had thought you didn’t know, I would have flaunted it because I was an awful person then.”

“That, I can believe.”

“Those Scandals trips led to the whole situation that got Dave outed, you know.”

“What do you mean? How?”

“He saw the two of you there and he thought that Blaine and I had broken up. So, he sent me secret admirer gifts leading up to Valentine’s Day and the last one said to meet up at Breadstix. I thought the gifts were from Blaine because that’s the week he was out of school from the surgery. I went to Breadstix. It was Dave. A guy from his football team saw him there with me and outed him.”

“I wasn’t kind to Dave.”

“Not surprising, given your general curmudgeonly demeanor at that point in time. You know if you had asked me to coffee alone and straight up told me that your father was a homophobic jackass and that you wished you had a dad like mine, I may very well have taken you home and practically adopted you.”

Sebastian laughed.

“Hey, now!” Sam said. “Where do you think I lived when I came back to Lima?”

“Wait, really?”

“Yeah. He lived with us his senior year and then again his second senior year when I was in New York for the first year. And I speak fluent French. You would have had someone to talk to.”

“My grandparents are French. It was my mother’s native language and I was raised bilingual until she died. I continued to take French lessons after she died. But Sam doesn’t speak French, so go back to English. We can chat in French some other time.”

“Oh, my God. No way. I’m worse than a former jackass. I’m a former idiotic jackass.”

Kurt and Sam laughed.

“What are you studying at Columbia?”

“English major, psychology minor.”

“Interesting.”

“Well, I convinced my father that evidence shows that those fields of study yield better results on the LSAT than pre-law. As soon as I get the second part of my trust fund, I am going back to Paris to live with my grandparents. My trust fund fine print has five parts. First, I had to graduate from high school and get into an Ivy League school, Columbia preferred because of my father and grandfather both attended Columbia. That’s how I got the apartment. Second and third parts are that I turn 22 and graduate from Columbia and get into law school. Fourth, I have to graduate from law school, pass the bar exam, and become a lawyer. And fifth, I have get married – to a woman. I get a lump-sum cash distribution when I turn 22, which is when I would have finished college back when the paperwork was drawn up. I would have turned 22 just about two months after finishing college if I hadn’t been taken back to Paris and then ended back up in Ohio. I had to repeat 3rd grade because while my spoken French was fine, my French spelling and writing skills were atrocious because I had only been in French school for a few months of 3rd grade. Then I got sent here and I had to complete two years of high school in order to graduate. So, I was 19. I was a mess when we met. I was an angry, jealous, jackass who wanted to be in Paris, not Nowhere, Ohio.”

“So, you’re going to complete this year of school, collect your trust fund on your birthday and then go to Paris?”

“That’s my current plan. I want to be a lawyer about as much as I want to move back to Ohio, but I am considering staying here to finish my Bachelor’s degree and then moving back to Paris for graduate school. That would allow me to collect the third part of my trust fund, which is an investment portfolio. The money I will get when I turn 22 was supposed be a fund to use while I was in law school so that I wouldn’t have to get a job while I went to school. It’s a decent amount of money, but nothing like what I will get if I graduate from Columbia and get accepted into law school. That’s why I’m debating whether to stay to finish out my degree here. I don’t care about the fourth part, which is that he will name me full partner in his law firm. And the fifth part is never happening because I won’t marry a woman just to collect the Smythe family stocks and bonds and the mansion where my grandmother lives in Columbus.”

“Got it. So, studying English?”

“I write. I want to be a writer. At least studying English literature is interesting. And there are language requirements of course, which allows me to take French literature courses without having to justify my course selections. And I can choose creative writing courses as guided electives within the English department.”

“I see. So, before we have to leave, tell me how you came to the conclusion that Blaine is a narcissist.”

“It doesn’t take long to identify one, once you know what you’re seeing. It’s like once someone
tells you that horses with stripes are zebras, you never call them horses with stripes ever again. A zebra is a zebra and they are plain to see to anyone who knows what a zebra is.”

“How were you so familiar with narcissism?”

“My dearest father of course. My mother went into therapy when we went back to France. When I was old enough, she explained to me why they had divorced and about his ‘issues’. I studied up on it when I was forced to go to Ohio so I might have some chance of surviving the ordeal. At first, I just thought Blaine was self-centered. I realized more as the year went on and even more in our senior year. Sometime we can sit and hash it all out if you want. But for now, I just want you to know that I had no idea about any of those horrible things had happened to you. I grew up in a non-prejudiced school. I probably knew I liked boys before we moved, but it was after we moved to Paris and I saw gay couples before I ever really thought about it. Anyway, I am sorry about all of it. There’s really very little I can do to make amends. You’ve obviously broken it off with Blaine, so I’m glad for you about that. I don’t know what you’ve been through since you moved to New York, other than I did, of course, hear about you being attacked. I did actually go visit you. I went really early, right before visiting hours and only stayed long enough to see if you were okay. I didn’t want to cause trouble with all of your friends that hate me.”

“Thanks for checking on me.”

Sebastian nodded. “You said your grandparents are French.”

“Are… were. They’re deceased.”

Sebastian took a deep breath. “I’m sorry to hear that. Do you have other relatives in France?”

“I would assume so. I don’t know any of them. But I assume that my mom’s parents weren’t only children. So their siblings probably had children, who would be my mom’s cousins, whose children would be my second cousins or something. I’ve never honestly tried to complete a family tree on her side since I have no way to get the information.”

“It can be gotten. The mairie would have the livret de famille on file for your grandparents and your mother’s name would be listed. From that you should be able to get your grandparents’ siblings’ names.”

“If I’m ever in France, I’ll give it a try.”

“Do you have a lot of family on your dad’s side?”

“Nope. There’s Uncle Andy and Aunt Mildred. They’re actually my dad’s aunt and uncle. Andy is my dad’s mother’s brother and Mildred is his wife. They live in eastern Ohio near the Pennsylvania/West Virginia state line.”

“And I’m guessing from your insistence that I keep quiet about speaking with your that the New Directions, besides Sam here, are no longer on your friends list.”

“Not at the present, except Mercedes.”

Sam spoke up. “We all drank the Kool-Aid and fell prey to Blaine’s powers. Mercedes and I have recovered. I spent the summer in therapy and was treated for depression. Talking about everything is how I learned about narcissism and I realized how I had fallen under his power. Mercedes and I basically kidnapped Kurt at the end of the reception Saturday evening. The two of them had just gotten back together and I couldn’t believe it when I saw the two of them step up to the front after walking Brittany and Santana in.”
“The ceremony wasn’t legally binding because Blaine and I didn’t have a marriage license. So, there was nothing legal about our part in the ceremony. Brittany and Santana had a license, so they’re actually married.”

“I see. So, the whole wedding was a last-minute thing?”

“You’re missing a lot of details. Briefly, I went back to Lima in September. Blaine was dating Dave, like seriously dating him. They were living together. He broke up with Dave about a week and a half ago, on Sunday. He and I got back together a few days later. We went to the wedding to be in the wedding party as groomsmen. Brittany talked us into getting married with them.”

“Wow, that’s so messed up.”

Sam nodded in agreement. “So, now you see why Mercedes and I kidnapped him at the end of the evening Saturday and talked some sense into him. Blaine has everyone so – I don’t even know a word for it – mesmerized, I guess is the best I can do. Burt was the one who was officiating Brittany and Santana’s wedding and he married Kurt and Blaine. There was no taking Kurt to the side and talking to him briefly or anything. Burt looked happy, Carole looked happy, and I was like – what is going on here?”

“As you can obviously see, I am a giant mess. I’m going to look for a counselor or therapist and try to get some help. I would appreciate it if you would answer any more inquiries you might get on my whereabouts with something expectedly sarcastic like ‘Why would I have any idea where he is?’ That way you are not lying, but you’re not providing them with any info.”

“Why did you split with him last spring?”

Kurt didn’t say anything.

Sam answered. “The regular narcissistic stuff. Power play, isolation, gaslighting, emotional abuse, control, all in the name of love, of course.”

“I get it. I saw my father pull that crap on my stepmother. For what it’s worth, I’m sorry. I didn’t realize he was that bad. I just saw him as a self-centered prick with narcissist traits. Good looking, but … We’ll that’s neither here nor there. I took him to Scandals with me because it kept the locals from hitting on me for the most part. And I didn’t like going alone.”

“‘Mr. I-met-the-love-of-my-life on the dance floor at Scandals and it lasted for 20 minutes’ didn’t like getting hit on?”

“I had forgotten I said that.” He laughed. “Definitely not. That’s how I ended up insulting Dave. He hit on me and I fired back with my acid tongue. I didn’t know anything about him. He was at Scandals when I was. But he always just sat at the bar in his jean jacket and trucker hat, slowly drinking a single beer all evening. When he tried to kill himself, I felt like maybe I was partially to blame because I had said mean things about his looks. I just responded with my normal jabs. I didn’t go to Scandals to hook up. I just wanted to not be at Dalton or my father’s house and I didn’t have any friends. The night the three of us went was the second time I had been there. I went the first time by myself and I got hit on way too much. Too intense for me with too many burly full-grown bears hitting on me. I’m not into bears or guys old enough to be my father. What happened that night? He came back in without you about 20 minutes after the two of you had left. He said you weren’t having a good time and that you wanted to go home.”

“Well, that night was one of several that should have set of warning bells, and it did, but I ignored them.”
“What does that mean?”

“It means that after our argument, he walked away and then before he got to the edge of the parking lot, it dawned on him that he had driven us there in his car and he turned around and walked back. I walked him back inside, gave his keys to the bouncer and told him not to give them back to Blaine until he was sober. I called a cab and I went home. I don’t drink, but I wasn’t the designated driver that night. Since he had been drinking, and it was his car, not mine – I was going to have to drive him to his house and then take a cab from there to my house anyway.”

“What did you fight about that caused him to storm off?”

Kurt closed his eyes, debating whether to answer. He sat there for several minutes and finally quietly answered, “About the meaning of the word ‘no’.”

Sam immediately wrapped his arms around Kurt and pulled him close. “He’s lucky I never knew that.”

“If I had known, I would have dropped him after deck ing him. I knew he was self-absorbed, but I didn’t know he was like that.”

“We had never really even made out at that point. He didn’t find me attractive. On the rare occasion he would say something nice about me, it was about something I had done. It was never about my looks. My clothes, perhaps, but not me. And then he went from pretty much chaste kisses to let’s do in the backseat of his car after supposedly just one beer and dancing with you. I was angry. He got hot and bothered dancing with you. Aroused enough that he wanted some release and he attempted to get it by convincing me to just do it in the backseat.”

“No wonder you hated me. I acted like he was God’s gift to gay teens and insulted you and he never built you up. He never told you how gorgeous you are. He let you believe that you were less attractive than him.”

Kurt shook his head and rolled his eyes. “For God’s sake, Sebastian, that’s what everyone thinks. Rachel made out with him. The girls from Crawford County Day gave him their numbers when we performed for them. All the New Directions girls thought he was amazing. They all told me repeatedly how lucky I was to find such a cute boy who was so nice and charming and sweet and on and on. The guys accepted Blaine and he hung out with them and I was still excluded from the guy’s group. My gay boyfriend was a guy, but I wasn’t. He got Tony. No one has ever said I was good-looking and definitely not, what did you just say? Gorgeous? Yeah, right.”

Sam cut in. “Just so you know, he told the guys that he had asked you and you said you didn’t want to come – that you had better ways to spend your time than eating junk food, playing video games, and watching movies you wouldn’t like.”

“Sounds like an answer the guys would have believed.”

Kurt noticed that Sebastian was crying. “What’s wrong?”

He wiped his eyes. “I’d like to show you around before you have to go.” He stood up.

“Okay.” Kurt was confused why showing them around was important, but he got up and Sam followed along behind. He pointed out things as they went along.

“So, obviously we came in there. That’s a coat and storage closet that the apartment door opens up against. Obviously, behind me is the kitchen.” He pointed to the long closet that was basically the dining room wall. “That’s another storage closet. This unit was designed for two single
professionals to share. Both of those long closets have hanging space for coats, but they also have vertical bike hangers at the end, so there’s a place to put bikes inside the apartment. He walked toward a hall between the two closets and they followed him. “This way leads to the bedrooms.” There were two smaller closets that faced the short hallway. “In this closet to the left, there’s a washer and dryer. This other closet has the furnace and water heater.”

“A washer and dryer in the unit is amazing.”

“It is. This is my room.” He stepped inside the room on the left and they followed. To the left, they saw a queen bed, made with a jade green quilt with coordinating throw pillows and two dark walnut side tables with lamps centered along the left wall, and a tall matching dresser between the door to the room and another door. He pointed. “The closet is obviously there and the door to the right of the dresser is the bathroom.”

He turned, walked past them, walked back out in the alcove, and into the other room. “This is the second bedroom.” It was a mirror image of Sebastian’s room, with the exception that it had a deep crimson quilt and different coordinating throw pillows on the bed.

“I love the tall windows. They let in a lot of light,” Kurt said. “And I love the idea of the shutters. They can be opened and closed a lot easier than curtains. And with the levers, you can control the amount of light. With them split in the middle vertically, you can open the top half back completely, while maintaining your privacy with the lower half closed, something you can’t do with blinds.”

“I came up with the idea when I kept trying to pick between curtains and blinds, neither coming out a winner. Then, I saw these half-height shutters on a kitchen window in a magazine and I thought it would be perfect to put two half-height sets on the windows for the very reasons you just said. I found a place that makes shutters to size and it was actually not much more than having custom curtains made.”

“Well, they’re really cool. And your place is really lovely.”

“Thanks.”

“Thanks for showing us around. We need to get going. I have to meet Madame Tibideaux in an hour.”

Kurt walked back to the main living area. Sam and Sebastian followed him.

“If you want, you could just take the subway. Sam can either go with you or stay here and watch TV or whatever. I’ll tell the doorman to let you back in when you get back, so you can get your truck out.”

Sam responded. “I would take you up on that, except that we have to clean out his storage unit which is near NYADA. I’m just going to drop him off and then wait for him at the storage place so we can get headed out of town as soon as we can. We have a little over four hours to drive when we leave.”

By then, they were all standing in front of the door.

“If you’re ever back in the city, let me know that you’re coming and you can stay here with me, if you’d like. The second room is always available.”

“Thanks. That’s really generous.”
“I wouldn’t mind the company.”

“I’m sure you have plenty of company.” Kurt raised his eyebrows and smirked.

Sebastian shook his head. “God, I screwed everything up back then. Look, I’m not a player. I’m not a one-night stand guy. I didn’t want people to bother me, so I just brushed people off. I had a serious boyfriend back in Paris. I broke up with him when I found out that we wouldn’t be able to be together for a really long time. At first we thought it would just be 10 months. He was going to apply to schools in New York. But… never mind, you have an appointment to keep.”

Kurt took a few steps forward and wrapped his arms around Sebastian. He startled a bit, but then relaxed and hugged Kurt back before stepping back. Sam pulled him into a hug too, which started Sebastian even more, but he didn’t push him away.

“We can be friends, but no more lying to me or Sam. We have to go now or I’ll be in more trouble than I already am. I’ll call you.”

Sebastian nodded and opened the door to let them out.

Kurt rode in silence other than giving Sam directions on where to turn to get to NYADA. Once Sam pulled over to let Kurt out, all he said was, “I’ll text you when I’m leaving. It should take me about 10 minutes to walk to the storage building. You know the way there, right?”

“Yeah, but I saved the directions just in case. I’ll see you in a little bit.” Sam pulled off.

Kurt took a deep breath and walked down the sidewalk and into the building. It took him about five minutes to get to Madame Tibideaux’s office. He sat down in the waiting area for his name to be called.

“Kurt, you’re up,” the secretary said quietly.

“Thanks.” He got up and knocked twice on the door before opening it.

“Come in, Mr. Hummel and have a seat.”

He shut the door behind him and sat as he had been instructed to do.

“It came to my attention Monday morning that you had withdrawn from the junior internship rather than turn in your mid-term report that was due. I checked your records and ascertained that you had instead enrolled in two distance-learning courses through the portal.”

“That’s correct, Madame Tibideaux. I chose the History of Theater option that was available and I chose an advanced French literature course to keep my French up-to-date.”

“I’m assuming that this has something to do with the spectacle that took place on Saturday in a barn.”

“It does, but probably not in the way that you’re thinking, Madame.”

“Well, I’m thinking that since you’re not wearing a wedding ring and you high-tailed it out of Dodge that someone finally poured enough ice water over your head for your brain to re-engage.”

“Madame?”
“You came here expecting me to be upset by your choice to drop out of the internship course and to threaten to wash you out of the program at the end of the semester. Did you not?”

“That thought had crossed my mind more than once.”

“Your script for your internship was quite well-done. I had been anticipating attending the production. Your Peter Pan venture was well-received.”

“You knew about that? You knew about the wedding, so I shouldn’t be surprised that you knew about Peter Pan.”

“I was actually thrilled to get your withdrawal notification because I knew the situation in Lima would not provide you with what you needed. I had hoped you would realize it sooner, but I am pleased with your replacement choices, as they will fill in needed components of your education here. I am hoping that you didn’t come today to tell me how you’re planning to transfer to another university or withdraw.”

“That is not my plan, but I do not have a workable plan for next semester yet.”

“I’d suggest you get back in contact with Ms. Wright. I think you’ll find that she has something in mind for you.”

“She is on my list of people to call.” Kurt was about to explain how he had spent Monday moving, Tuesday and Wednesday doing Monday through Thursday’s schoolwork, and that day in a truck, plus my appointments in the city – but he managed to quell that thought and merely added, “I will contact her soon.”

“I expect you to get your original internship idea back on track at the beginning of next semester. Despite the fact that the internship is to be completed in the fall, I am making an exception. You will start this January when classes start again.”

“Yes, Madame Tibideaux. Thank you.”

“You may be pleased to know that Mr. Crawford rejoined our ranks this fall as the alumni director of the Adam’s Apples. He spent a year back in England doing some work on the West End. He was selected as one of five playwrights to study at Julliard in their fellowship program.”

“That’s fantastic.”

“It is. He is very talented and that program is highly respected.”

“I’m glad for him.”

“I am making one personal recommendation and that is that you utilize the mental health services this institution offers its full-time students at no cost. I will be sending the office a letter requiring them to provide services via telephone until you relocate to the City.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. You aren’t the first, and unfortunately will not be the last, to be ensnared by a narcissist.”

“You knew?”

“I figured it out. Leopards can try to paint themselves a solid color, but eventually their spots show.
On your way out, please instruct my secretary to change your current address to your parents’ home address until you return to New York. I don’t want you to put where you are currently living in the system and risk that information making its way to Lima.”

“Thank you for everything.” He looked her directly in the eye. “Although, I do wonder how you have time to sleep.” He smiled.

“Ah, a trick I am unwilling to share. It would make me lose my advantage, which I am quite fond of having.”

“Well, should you ever decide to give a class on the topic, please add my name the top of the enrollment list.”

She laughed. “I take it that Congressman Hummel remains in good health.”

“He is quite well. Thank you for asking. He did not run for re-election, so his time as a Congressman is coming to an end.”

She pursed her lips and nodded in understanding.

“If you have time, upon your return to the City, I would suggest that you consider rejoining the Adam’s Apples. That group has always been comprised of an eclectic group of uniquely talented people in many areas of theater. They may not be the top singers at the school, but many of them have been extremely talented in other areas. A man such as yourself, with unusual talent, should take advantage of opportunities to spend time with such creative people who will be writing, directing, staging, scoring, and arranging musicals in the future. One can never underestimate the power of the bonds of friendship. And I mean real friends, not the type you’ve been accustomed to having.”

“Yes, Madame Tibideaux.”

Her tone changed to one of the conversation being at its end. “I am sure that you have other things on your agenda for today with this being a quick trip, but please do get in contact with Ms. Wright before you leave town. I’m looking forward to your return. You will be in my voice class again. Your schedule will be designed to accommodate for your unusual situation.”

“Yes, I will. Thank you.”

“I will see you in January, Mr. Hummel. And congratulations on starting your journey to living your life on your own terms. I think you are nearly to the point of being able to sing your original audition song truthfully.”

Kurt stood and nodded. He exited the room feeling much different than he had expected to. He texted Sam to tell him that he was on his way.

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As soon as he exited the building, he texted Isabelle. Five minutes later, his phone was ringing.

“Are you in the City?”

“I am, as long as it’s only you asking. Otherwise, I’m on a remote island in the South Pacific.”

She laughed. “I really need to see you before you leave town again. Can you meet me?”
“Wherever it is needs a parking lot. We drove.”

“We, being?”

“Sam and I drove here in his truck.”

“Sam, the former model?”

“That’s the one.”

“He’s welcome to come with you. I’ll text you the address of a place. I’ll cover the cost of the valet service. Just pull up and let them park Sam’s truck.”

“We have to load up the stuff in my storage unit first. How far away is the place you want to meet from NYADA?”

“Not that far. Ten minutes or so.”

“Okay. We should be able to be there in a half-hour or any time after that.”

“I’ll text you the address and a time in a few minutes.”

“Thanks.”

By the end of the call, he had reached the storage unit. He saw Sam waiting and waved to get Sam’s attention.
Chapter 13

Kurt unlocked the unit and they loaded the boxes into the truck quickly. He put his bike in last. Kurt went into the office and settled his account. By then he had gotten the text with the location from Isabelle. He walked back to where Sam was waiting and got in the passenger seat.

“Isabelle wants to meet in 30 minutes. I have the address.” He put the address in and Sam headed out of the lot following the directions Kurt was reading to him. They arrived 10 minutes early, but they went ahead and let the valet take the truck to the parking lot. He put the ticket safely in his wallet.

“I think we are underdressed for this place. Like way underdressed,” Sam said.

“Well, I’m sure that Isabelle didn’t expect me to come to move boxes wearing an Armani suit. We’ll just wait for her here on the sidewalk and see what her plan is.”

At the arranged meeting time, a town car pulled up and Kurt’s phone pinged with a text that said for them to get in the town car.

“Come on. This is our ride.”

“She had us drive here and then sent a car?”

“Must have been the only place that she knew she we could park the truck safely.”

They got in the car and they were driven to the Vogue office.

Kurt just laughed. “She didn’t have time to leave to meet us somewhere.”

The two of them rode the elevator up and Kurt stepped up to the reception desk.

“Long time, no see, Kurt. Isabelle’s waiting for you in her office.” She handed Kurt two visitor’s passes.

They went directly to Isabelle’s office. The door was open, but Kurt knocked gently to get her attention.

“Get in here. I’ve missed you.” She hugged him before he managed to get close enough to the sofa to sit down.

“I’ve missed you too.”

“Don’t sit down. We’re going to the conference room.” She led the way down the hall. Once they were inside, she shut the door. “I ordered you lunch. I know it’s late, but I figured you hadn’t eaten yet. I haven’t, so join me.”

They sat down and opened the bags and took out Indian food from Kurt’s favorite place.

“You remembered.”

“Of course. I hope you like the same thing Kurt does, Sam. I wasn’t sure what to order for you.”

“I’m sure it’s fine. I’m not picky. Thank you.”
She smiled and nodded at Sam, and then turned her gaze on Kurt. “So. I need you to come back and work for me. This just has to happen as soon as possible. If I have to try to train one more person to fill your shoes, I am going to start pulling my hair out.”

“I know better than that. You value your hair far too much to pull it out.”

“You haven’t met my last four assistants.”

“Four? I’ve only been gone a year.”

“A very, very long year.”

Kurt laughed. You had assistants before me.”

“Yes, and I thought they were decent, but then you came along and I realized that they were terrible. Please come back. I’ve even managed to convince HR to pay you more. And I arranged your schedule to coincide with Carmen’s schedule for you.”

“Already?”

“Did you miss the part where I NEED you to come back?” She laughed.

“I got that part. This is good. Thank you. I haven’t had this in, well, over a year.”

“I’m glad you like the food, but you didn’t answer my question. I am a busy woman with a terrible PA. I can only beg so much before I become pathetic.”

Sam laughed.

“Since you haven’t said no yet, I’m going to continue my sales pitch. You can work from 2-6 each day and some evenings, but only in emergencies, and of course, by emergencies I mean red carpet events that I’m supposed to attend. You’ll be my standing +1.”

Kurt nodded and continued to eat.

“I can offer you $15 an hour.”

Kurt about choked. “That’s twice what I made before.”

“That’s because you were a lowly intern, who is rarely worth more than minimum wage. But no more intern. You’ll be my part-time PA. Are you convinced yet?”

He smirked and tipped his head to the side, teasing her.

“Let’s see. You can have access to the vault for all of your +1 events. The hair department will keep you looking the part. Am I getting close yet? What is it that you want that is within my power to give you?”

“I have to find a place to live that I can afford.”

“That’s easy enough. Just take Sebastian up on his offer.”

“Sebastian?”

“Didn’t he ask you to move in this morning?”
“No. Why would he?”

“Because he told me that he was going to.”

“Why would he talk to you? I’m so lost.”

“His jackass father is my cousin. I’m from Ohio too, remember? My mother is his father’s sister. I’ve spent many a Thanksgiving and Christmas at Grandma’s with dear old Stephen.” She rolled her eyes.

“The being from Ohio I remember. You being related to Sebastian is new information.”

“Well, he was still in high school when you were my assistant. He wasn’t here in the City then, so I wasn’t spending any time with him. I actually didn’t even know he was back in the States until Stephen was ranting about having to bail him out of legal trouble over some false drug accusation a year ago at Easter. I had managed to not visit for several years, but my grandma turned 85 that weekend, so I schlep to Ohio for her party. I hadn’t seen Sebastian since he was about 8, so I didn’t recognize him milling around the place. Stephen pointed him out after I asked.”

“Okay. I’m just feeling a bit like Alice again.”

“Anyway, I’m not sure what went on at his place this morning that he didn’t ask you to move in. Did the two of you get into an argument or something?”

“There was a lot of talking and quite a few tears, but no arguing.”

“He’s a nice kid. His life totally sucked for a couple of years, but he seems to have gotten his head on straight, especially since he got away from Stephen. He and I have been in contact since the party and we’ve become good friends since he moved here nearly a year and a half ago. I decided to take him under my wing when he got here. I found him a good therapist. I didn’t fit all of the pieces together until he mentioned the proposal at his school. I don’t even remember how it came up in conversation. It was after you had left to take more hours at the diner because you could work evenings and weekends there. Anyway, I eventually figured out that the two of you knew each other.”

“I did notice the improved wardrobe, but I was doing my best not to instigate an argument by implying that his previous choices were terrible.”

Isabelle laughed. “So, anyway, the two of you need to talk more. And you can think about my offer. So, tell me how you finally came to your senses and escaped from the lair of the cheating loser.”

Kurt gave a brief synopsis of the previous 6 months, ending with, “Sam and Mercedes kidnapped me after the reception.”

“Oh, my God. I’m going to call you Super Sam for saving him from that. Are you still interested in modeling?”

“I enjoy it, but living here got to be too much. Too many people, not enough work.”

“I can’t help you with the crowds, but I can help you with the work – at least until the end of the school year. The layout department is losing both of their interns to better positions or something, starting next semester. I’ll recommend you, if you’re interested. It’s basically being the art and layout department’s go-fer. It just pays minimum wage, but you could work 9-6 with a one-hour lunch. It’s not much, but it’s set hours. Once people see you around, I might be able to get you
weekend or evening modeling jobs or you can coordinate and take a day off.”

“Can I think about it? I just left Lima with no plan three days ago. Could I have until Monday? I don’t have anywhere to live either, and on minimum wage here, even full time, I can’t find a place that won’t require several roommates and an hour commute.”

“That’s fine.” She picked her phone up and texted someone quickly. “So, Kurt, will you please come back?”

“You win, Isabelle. I’ll come back, IF I can find a place I can afford to live on what you’re offering. Working those hours, means that Madame Tibideaux has obviously planned for me to work on the internship in the mornings, along with having my regular classes in the mornings, so there is no way that I will be able to work a second job. I will have evening rehearsals at some point, I’m sure, and I have to do my schoolwork at some point. I can’t run myself into the ground like I did last year. She’s giving me a chance to redeem myself and I can’t expect that to happen twice. I didn’t expect it today. How do you know her anyway?”

“She and I go way back.”

“I bet you do,” Kurt laughed and shook his head.

“It’s a story involving the absolute need for a very particular turban.”

Kurt laughed again. “You’ll have to tell it to me sometime. I’ll let you know soon about the job. I’ll start looking at places to live. If Sam decides to go somewhere else, I could move back in the dorm if I have to. But I’d have to take out another loan because working here wouldn’t be enough to cover living in the dorm.”

“The price of college is ridiculous these days. I know I sound like an old fart, but my God, it’s like they expect teenagers to make $30 an hour and have time to work full time and go to school.”

Kurt pulled his phone out and opened the calculator app. “That would barely cover my tuition. By the time you figure in taxes, I’d need to make nearly $50 an hour working full time to pay my tuition and my living expenses here.”

“That’s insane.”

“It is.” Kurt stood and cleared his place and Sam’s. Isabelle hadn’t finished hers, so he left it. “I’ll let you know as soon as I can. We need to go reclaim the truck and get going. We’ve got a long drive ahead of us.”

“You can’t leave just yet. I have something for you back in my office. We’ll just stop by there on the way out.” She picked up her lunch container and headed back to her office. She sat the container down and picked up a gray gift bag from her desk and handed it to Kurt. “They’re just fun things that I’ve saved for you from different swag bags. You can open it up later. I know you need to get going. I’ll call the hotel and have them bring your truck out of the lot.”

“Thank you for everything. Really. I’ve missed you. I’ll let you know about the position as soon as I can.”

She gave him another hug and hugged Sam too. “Thank you for what you did.”

Sam just nodded and smiled.

“Call me,” she said as they walked away from her office toward the elevator.
While they waited for the car to arrive, Kurt texted Sebastian.

--Could I bring my bike and store it in one of your closets? I was going to break down and donate it somewhere today, but after I saw your closets, I thought I’d give this a shot before resorting to drastic measures.

--Sure. I’ll go downstairs in a few minutes. I’ll wait outside the building and just grab it and take it upstairs so you can hit the road.

--Thanks.

Five hours later, they knocked on the apartment door in DC with a trolley loaded with Kurt’s stuff. Carole opened the door and let them in. They unloaded the boxes and Sam took the trolley back down while Kurt stacked the boxes along the wall to get them out of the way for the evening.

“How did it go?”

“Better than I had imagined. Madame Tibideaux is allowing me to move my internship to the spring semester. Isabelle offered me a job. I have a lot to think about. I’m going to go ahead and shower.”

“That’s fine, honey. I’m glad the school issue is resolved. And a job offer is good.”

Carole waited for Sam to get back up before she moved away from the door. Once he was in, she shut and locked it. “He’s in the shower.”

“I figured. It was a long day. I’m going to head in there as soon as he comes out.”

“Are the two of you hungry? There’s chicken enchilada casserole left.”

“Sounds great. Thanks.”

“While I have you to myself, I want to thank you for what you did for him. I’ve been, well, distracted for lack of a better word. I’ve not been a good mother to him.”

“He’s never been upset with you. He understood.”

“That may very well be, but he’s needed me and I wasn’t there. And I’m glad that you were.”

Sam nodded.

Kurt tried to sleep, but he was too restless. He got up and sat on the sofa and sent Sebastian a text because he just couldn’t push the conversation with Isabelle out of his mind.

--It seems that you forgot to ask me something this morning.

He didn’t have to wait very long for a response.

--After realizing how much worse everything I had done was than I had ever considered, I didn’t ask because I couldn’t imagine any circumstance in which you would be willing to live with me.
after what I did to you.

Kurt got up and opened his laptop. He started some music and moved it over to the kitchen table. He went into the laundry room, shut the door, and sat down on the floor in the dark. He dialed Sebastian’s number.

“Sebastian, you really need a reality check. I’ve been overlooked and pushed to the side by everyone I know. It’s not like the things you did somehow make you a special type of villain or something. It was life. It is life. Whenever I’ve managed to make it through a full week without being made fun of in some way, I’ll let you know.”

“Well, I am really sorry.”

“So you’ve said – more than once. Let’s go back to talking to each other about ourselves and see what we actually learn about each other without the snark. You already know that my life isn’t a gay boy’s fairy tale. Let’s try to hold a civil conversation and see where that leads.”

Kurt spent the next morning using the bedroom as a staging area and opened up all of the boxes that had clothing in them first. He moved the clothes from the coat closet into the walk-in so he could view everything easily. He knew that he was going back to New York. He was fairly certain he would take the job as Isabelle’s PA. And she had offered him access to the vault. If he had some desperate need for a particular type of outfit, he was sure that he could find something suitable in the vault.

He knew he needed clothes to wear to Vogue and clothes to wear to school, which were two completely different kinds of clothes. And then there was the third category of what he wanted to wear when he wasn’t either place. The first thing to go was the blue suit and purple shirt he had worn to Dalton that day. He would never rewear it. He sorted, tried on, resorted and finally pared down what he had to things that he would actually enjoyed wearing in his free time and a few special things that he wore with enough frequency to justify keeping them.

In the end, he had eliminated nearly half of his clothing. He realized that he was in desperate need of some new dance clothes and loungewear. He couldn’t bring himself to put on or wear anything that he had allowed Blaine to wear. The emotional rollercoaster from even seeing that clothing was just too much. He put them in a donation box, along with any items that had been gifts from Blaine.

He looked up resale shops in the area and packed up what he wasn’t keeping in a few of the totes to see what he could sell. He figured with all of the swanky parties in DC, that he had at least an equal chance of selling the stuff there as he had in New York. He found three that weren’t that far away. He decided to start with the most high-end looking shop and save Plato’s Closet for last. He set off after lunch.

He sold most of the items. He stopped at a Target and bought two more pairs of sweats like the ones that Sam had chosen for him and he bought another hoodie, a gray one with a bunch of phases from Doctor Who written so they formed the shape of the Tardis on the back.

He dropped the unwanted items off at a Goodwill and found a couple of pairs of vintage pajama sets and a robe, which he needed since he had never replaced his after the opening night debacle. He also found a pair of dance pants that fit, an ancient Golden Girls t-shirt, and a really funny red Monty Python hoodie that was printed on the front and back. The exact directions for throwing the Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch were written on parchment in a calligraphy font on the back.
He made one last stop at an FYE just to look around. He found used box sets of the Tenth Doctor’s seasons and specials. He decided to splurge on himself and buy them. He figured it would give him, Sam, and Carole something fun to do for a while. And it was a great first purchase for himself since it was something he would have never bought when he was with Blaine because he would have chided him for spending money on it and mocked him because he thought Doctor Who was ridiculous.

When he got back to the apartment, dinner was nearly done. He set the table. Burt came in not long afterwards. They sat down together and ate. Kurt discussed their trip to New York.

Sam cleaned up after dinner so that Kurt could finish up the boxes in the bedroom. He folded all of the short-sleeved clothes back up and put them in a tote. He stored the rest of his warm-weather-only items in a second tote. Items that didn’t lend themselves to being folded, he left hanging on hangers and put them back into the garment bags he already had. He opened the boxes that didn’t have clothing in them and organized what was left and put everything in totes rather than the cardboard boxes and stacked them in the walk-in closet.

When Kurt came out, Burt went in and worked on some things he needed to read and research. Kurt continued with his project and took the tags off the items he had gotten while he was out and added his other dirty clothes to the load. He showed Sam his splurge, and less than five minutes later, the first episode was playing. Kurt got up and down a couple of times to deal with his laundry.

Burt came out of the bedroom once he finished what he was doing and the Doctor Who episode was over and he watched a football game. Kurt took his French book back to the bedroom to do schoolwork during the game.

Saturday the four of them spent time on the National Mall and visiting Burt’s office and the Capitol Building.

Sunday afternoon, Sam asked Kurt to go for a walk with him. They drove the truck to a park and went walking on a trail through the wooded area.

“The vest is great for this type of weather,” Sam said.

“I agree. I never really gave them a chance after my failed butch attempt. But they are actually really useful. What did you want to talk to me about?”

“I’ve done a lot of thinking the last few days,”

“You’re not going to New York with me, are you?”

“I spent a lot of time on the phone with my mom and dad the last few days. I don’t like living in New York City, but I want to be with you. I’ve missed our friendship. Being with you just for a week makes me realize even more how much I missed spending time with you. If you were moving there until May to finish up and then you wanted to live somewhere else, I could do that. I could go there and take the job that Isabelle offered and stay until you finished, and then move somewhere else with you. But you love it there. You want to live there permanently. I’m torn.”

“I understand. I really do. You could be really happy in a place like Lima, LIKE Lima, not actually Lima. But a place like that doesn’t usually have room for someone like me. I don’t know that I could live someplace I don’t like at all just to stay with you. I would try. So I understand your dilemma and I can’t ask you to be miserable.”
“My only other option is venturing out completely on my own somewhere or going to Kentucky and moving in with my parents. I’m going to look into some training options. I really need to figure out what I want to do with my life. Just filling the time with whatever is in front of me isn’t fulfilling. I liked helping with the football team. I liked modeling. I just don’t know who I am anymore. Mercedes question to you applies to me too. Am I going to be the leading man in my own life story or am I going to just float along as an extra in other people’s stories?”

“I get that. I’ve asked myself a dozen times in the last few days whether NYADA and Broadway is what I really want now or if I’m just being stubborn and refusing to change paths. Do I want to live in a city that I cannot afford to live in? Even if I get a lead role in an off-Broadway production, I won’t make ever make enough to buy a place in Manhattan. I’m going to be a slave to insanely high rent my entire life. The best I can hope for on my own will be renting a small efficiency. I could afford a small one-bedroom apartment with one roommate who is willing to share a bedroom with me. I will always be hauling clothes to a laundromat and carrying my bags of groceries up numerous flights of stairs.”

“So you’re not dead-set on staying in New York City.”

“I don’t know what I want anymore. Some days, I think I’d like to find a nice place outside of a fairly large city and a shop to work at and get a dog and enjoy my life. I could renew my mechanic’s certifications and get more. I made more at 16 as a mechanic than I will if I take the job Isabelle is offering me. Now, granted, the job at Vogue is a lot more what I like to do, but I think last weekend was just a giant, cosmic big-bang end of my teenage dream. Like you just said, Mercedes told me I needed to figure out whether I’m going to be the leading man in my own life story. It’s a really good question. Being with you and my parents makes me see that I am not impossible to live with. Eliminating the incredibly stressful relationship will help. But being away from the stress also makes me feel really weird because I am used to being shoved into the middle of every dispute and being asked to be the voice of reason, which of course means that I should side with whoever dragged me into the middle of it. Having all of that vanish instantaneously is really disorienting. I’m going to start the therapy over the phone, so hopefully that will help me regain some balance.”

“So, you’re wondering whether you’re going back to New York because that’s what you really want or if you’re going back because that’s what you feel like you have to do?”

“And the third option is whether I’m going back just to prove other people wrong. Blaine obviously felt that I don’t have the talent to make it. Rachel never believed that I had the star power she has. I got rejected twice before I got in when they got in on their first tries. I didn’t get chosen for Winter Showcase last year and I won’t again this year. If I’m busy doing my internship next semester, I will be too busy to audition for any roles that, as an upperclassman, I’m finally eligible to audition for at NYADA.”

Sam let Kurt collect his thoughts.

“So, next year I have just one chance left to get into a fall drama production and a spring musical production before I graduate. But I honestly don’t have the time to be in a production outside class time because I have to work too many hours just to be able to live and eat. How will a musical theatre degree with no actual experience make me a better candidate for a Broadway role than I was when I came here with no experience? Yes, my skill level has improved, but is that enough to justify the massive debt I’m in now? I could have hired a vocal coach and a personal dance instructor and worked for a year to improve my skills for a lot less than I’ve paid for college so far. And it’s just going to get worse. I have three more semesters of debt to incur before I finally finish. Is it worth it?”
“I know you don’t expect me to have an answer. I don’t even know where to go look for the answers.”

“And then I think about my parents. My dad is spending enough on my college tuition that he could have paid their house in Lima off. I’m pushing my parents into making payments on a house for years to come when they could have paid their house off. It makes me feel awful. You already know Dad didn’t run for re-election. In January, they’ll be back in Lima permanently, so I want to make sure and maximize the time I have here with them now because in a couple of months this option will be over. My dad has made quite a bit as a congressman, but the additional staffing costs at the shop, the rent on this place, the travel costs, and the part of my tuition that they’ve paid has pretty much eaten up all of that money. I’m going to try to encourage them to downsize. Even if I get married and adopt kids some day, a two-bedroom house with decent-sized bedrooms would be plenty large enough for any potential spouse and family I might have to visit them. They don’t need the high mortgage payments, the increased cost for heating and cooling, and higher property taxes when it will just be the two of them living there. When Finn was still alive and living at home, the extra space made more sense, but now it just doesn’t.”

“I see your point.”

“I talked to Sebastian on the phone for a long time Friday night when you were sleeping. He and I finally broke through the snark and anger and jealousy and managed to talk to each other. He is offering to let both of us live with him. We’d share the second bedroom. He doesn’t want us to pay rent, but he would expect us to pay for our own food and if one of us wants cable TV, we’d have to pay for that as well. Plus, any increase to the cost of the utilities would be our responsibility. Three people use a lot more water than one. The apartment belongs to him outright. His dad has no say in who lives with him.”

“That’s really generous of him. I figured he’d want us to pay him rent.”

“Me too. So, we can go to New York and have the next five or six months to figure ourselves out or I can go and you can go back to Kentucky or somewhere else of your choosing. I’ll leave it up to you to think about and decide. If you took the job Isabelle is offering, you could save up about $600 a month, I think. If you stayed through the end of May you could save up about $3000 to start you off with a deposit on an apartment somewhere of your choosing, if you decide you don’t want to stay in New York.”

“So, when are you going to go back?”

“I thought I’d spend another week or two here with my parents and do as much sightseeing as we can possibly fit in. It’s difficult to study here because the apartment is so small and the only study surface is in the middle of the living area basically. I can’t lay my stuff out or leave anything out because we have to eat at the table. I will just make it work somehow, probably by finding some place else to study in afternoons so that Carole doesn’t have to feel obligated to stay quiet so much of the day. If I go back soon, I can start to make money again too. I don’t have that much savings.”

“It didn’t sound like I could start yet. I need to find out when I could actually start working.”

Neither one of them said anything for a while.

Kurt broke the silence. “I think that’s one of the hardest things about being an adult is realizing that there isn’t always a right choice and sometimes there is more than one right choice, but you still have to choose, never knowing fully how your choice will end up playing out in the long run.”

“Yeah.”
They continued to walk on the trail in silence for a while, both caught up in their own thoughts.

“I planned sightseeing trips starting early in the mornings. All three of us can go and come back after lunch and you can get started on your schoolwork.”

“Thank you for doing the planning. I feel bad that I’m so swamped. It won’t get any better in New York though. Next semester, I’m looking at 12-hour days Monday through Friday by the time I add in travel time. And then I’ll have to get my schoolwork done after that.”

“If we don’t have to pay Sebastian rent, wouldn’t that mean that you wouldn’t have to work so many hours and you could audition for the spring musical?”

“Not really. You heard Sebastian. He hasn’t decided whether he’s going back to France after his birthday in July. And I don’t honestly know whether he’s just offering to let us stay through the end of the school year to give us time to get on our feet again or whether he’s going to let us stay past the end of the school year even if he does decide to stay here. I’m going to have to put back every extra nickel I earn to be able to put a deposit down on another place or to put toward living in a dorm, if you decide to move away from the City at the end of the year. I’ve definitely decided that I won’t be sharing a living space with a group of people I don’t know for my last year of college. At least in a dorm, there are study rooms and I can use late at night, and during the day I can stay in the campus library if I have to.”

Sam went back to thinking.

Kurt pulled his phone out and texted Isabelle.

--How long before Sam and I could start?

Her reply was nearly instantaneous.

--Does that mean yes?

--It means I need more information. :)

--You can start right away. I will get rid of my terrible PA. Her last day will be the day before whenever you can start. As for Sam, I’ll have to find out. I’ll text you back when I know. It might be tomorrow morning before I can find out.

--Okay.

--You still didn’t say whether you’re coming back. Sebastian said the two of you talked for a long time.

--We did.

--Let me know soon.

--I will.

“Isabelle is going to ask when you can start. She’ll let me know as soon as she finds out.”

“So where does that leave us?”

“It leaves us with a 6-month option for staying in New York without having to go into debt to do it. And job offers. Other than that, the rest of our issues remain the same. But we’re way ahead of where we were a week ago.”
Sam laughed. Sam shoulder checked him. “That’s true. A week ago, you were in a hotel room in rural Indiana with Mercedes.”

“Ugh. I’ve lost years of my life. I feel like up is down and down is up. I’m hoping the counseling helps make my life stop spinning. Let’s head back to the apartment. I want to do something with Dad today, even if it’s sit and watch baseball on TV.”

“Wrong season,” Sam teased.

“Whatever. A fishing show then. I don’t care. I’m just going to go watch whatever it is and pay close attention to what’s happening. I need to do a better job of engaging with him. I was very stubborn and he bent more than I did. Time to reverse that. I’m not a child and I need to learn to not act like one. He took me to shows and watched movies I liked and never once tried to look at a magazine while it was on. I need to be more respectful.”

Monday morning Kurt got a text from Isabelle letting him know that Sam could start immediately, but only half-time. The afternoon intern was looking to leave even earlier than the end of the semester, but hadn’t actually resigned because she thought it would look bad on her record. She was struggling to keep up with her schoolwork. When Isabelle talked to her, she told her that it would be better to quit and get a good recommendation for her work ethic than to stick around and call out as often as she had been. Sam decided to take her place for the remainder of the year and then fill both positions after the new year.

For the next two weeks, Kurt, Sam, and Carole spent their mornings together playing tourist around DC. Kurt did his schoolwork in the afternoons at a few nearby shops. He came back in time for dinner each evening. Once dinner was over, he spent each evening actually watching whatever Burt wanted to watch and doing his best to follow along and interact with Burt about the shows or games.

The first weekend, Kurt and Burt went out together and Burt gave him an in-depth tour of his office and showed him how he actually spent his days and talked about the committees he had been on and the legislation that he had worked hard to pass or block.

By the end of the two weeks, Kurt, Sam, and Carole had visited all of the museums on the National Mall and the National Zoo.

Their last Friday, Burt managed to get tickets for all four of them to go on the White House tour. In the years he had been in office, it was the first time he had gone. The four of them enjoyed their visit, but Kurt was disappointed that there was no chance of catching even a passing glance of President Obama since he was in Australia at the G20 Brisbane Summit.

The last Sunday they were in DC, Kurt spent the afternoon making Burt and Carole’s favorites, including a pie, for dinner. They all sat down to eat together.

Burt was the first to speak. “This is really good. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.”

“I just want to make sure that you are actually on your way to New York. You don’t have some incurable disease that you don’t have much time left, do you?”
Kurt was taken aback. “No, of course not, Dad. Why would you even ask that?”

“Well, for two weeks, you’ve cooked all of my favorite meals and foods, even desserts you usually don’t want me to eat. You’ve sat and watched things I know you hate, and you’ve actually interacted with me about the content. I feel like maybe this is your perfect farewell. You know spending time doing what I want and making everything perfect.”

“Oh, I hadn’t thought about it that way. That’s not it at all. I just have done a lot of thinking and when I was in high school and even afterwards, I was really childish. I hated how the guys treated me and I took that hatred out on the things they liked. I made fun of what they liked and I refused to put any effort into learning to enjoy any of those things, which happened to be the things that you liked as well. I wanted you to learn to like musicals and plays and fashion shows. You once said something about us having a deal where I didn’t try to change you and you didn’t try to change me, but that wasn’t really true. I really did want you to change. I really wanted you to love what I was interested in. But the reality was that I was childish, which made sense at first, but I didn’t mature past that point. I wasn’t willing to put forth the effort to see what you enjoyed about what you liked. I didn’t really try. I made it a one-way relationship when it came to spending time together. I cooked for you and did the chores you asked and I worked and learned to fix cars, so I wasn’t a disrespectful brat who defied your guidance or rules, but I didn’t try to branch out and go to a game with you, and when you took Finn, I got angry and jealous. Looking back, I can see that your response of assuring me that you loved me no matter what was the right parental response, but my response should have been to change something about my behavior as well. I’ve been dealing with someone whose idea of compromise is me doing what he wants any time a dispute arises. I realize that the two situations are completely different. You and I never argued about whose interests were better or more important. Neither one of us was trying to get the other to give up anything personally important. But I look back on when I was living at home, and at some point, I should have matured enough to realize that I could enjoy something even if it wasn’t something I would have chosen to do by myself.”

“I see. Well, I’m glad to know that you don’t have some incurable disease. And I appreciate the sentiment. I also am starting to realize that I made a lot of decisions based on inaccurate information and I did things that I meant in good-natured teasing that were really hurtful to you. At some point along the line, I should have also encouraged you to do things with me that you didn’t want to do by explaining the give and take of a relationship. Rather than telling you that we weren’t going to try to change each other, I should have helped you see the value in enjoying someone else’s hobby with them, even if only for long enough to share the joy they felt about it, not their actual interest in it. So, I let you get away with never having to do things you didn’t want to do because it was easier and you were a sweet kid. You weren’t refusing to watch basketball because you were being defiant or mean, so I just let you go to your room and sew a new costume and I fawned over you when you pranced around in it. You were 10 years old and I couldn’t have made what you did. It was impressive, so I was impressed. But I didn’t do you any favors by letting you skip playing any sports. It made you even more different than you already were in a town where different wasn’t a good thing to be.”

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“I just wanted these two weeks to be different. I wanted to try to see why your interests are interesting to you. I’m not a child anymore, although I did something really stupid a couple of weekends ago. I’m certainly not free from what I’ve been through, but the counseling is helping. I’ve been seeing the world through warped glasses. I’m wearing the right prescription now, but seeing clearly is still a struggle when things don’t look the way I expect them to. I don’t know how else to describe it. Let me think of an example…” He paused for a couple of minutes. “I know. My clothes. When I went shopping after I got here, I bought more sweatpants and two hoodies. I had enjoyed wearing the hoodie and sweats that Sam had gotten me. I never let myself dress that way. I saw my wardrobe through the warped glasses of dressing to impress. I was so obsessed with never
wearing the same shirt more than twice a month to school or wearing the same combination of items. Getting dressed became this stressful, time-consuming task, but I had to do it. I had to dress to impress, even if I was only impressing myself. At NYADA, people hang around the school all day in jazz pants, dance shorts, tanks, leotards, and hoodies all the time. I finally got used to seeing myself that way some of the time, but only at school in those classes or when I was home alone and rehearsing. Otherwise, I was back to perfectly-ready-for-Vogue outfits. I’ve also realized that by demanding such high standards for my own wardrobe that I put people off. I came across as snobbish or like I thought I was too good to be friends with people who didn’t dress as well as I did. That was never how I viewed myself, but my obsessive behavior about it set me apart. When I was living in the loft alone last summer, I found out that I actually really like casual clothes sometimes. I actually went out of the loft in casual clothes, like shorts and a t-shirt. And no one called the fashion police.”

Burt laughed.

“I know. Shocking,” he said sarcastically, then continued. “What I decided when I sorted through all of my clothes is that I don’t need 30 long-sleeved shirts and 30 pairs of pants so that I can make 900 combinations out of them. I might even get a couple more pairs of the sweats. I can put them on over my dance clothes or switch them with my dance pants quickly and I can commute to school and back and do whatever I need to do during the day wearing casual clothes. It’s okay not to be 100% Vogue ready every time I step out of the house. But when I went back to Lima, perfection-driven Kurt came back. I started stressing over what to wear when I didn’t have that many things with me – it was really ridiculous.”

“I agree, but I’m glad that you’ve come to this realization on your own. Whenever I tried to bring it up, you shot me down because I have zero fashion sense.”

“That was unkind of me to say. You dressed the part of middle-aged, small town mechanic. You weren’t a big-city lawyer or fashion designer. What you wore suited who you were. I just didn’t want to be who I was. I didn’t want to be a small town dweller. I wanted to be in a big city and I dressed the way I thought was suitable for that.”

Kurt took a few bites of food before he spoke again.

“The other thing I’ve realized is that my role as Blaine’s boyfriend was a performance. Unless I was somewhere he wasn’t, I was ‘on’ all the time – meaning there was no downtime. He frequently visited the diner where I worked and I never knew when he would show up. At NYADA, he was there all the time. He managed to get into almost all of my courses, so even at school, he was there all the time.”

“You never felt relaxed around him.”

“Yes and no. I can’t say that I was relaxed because I’m honestly not sure that I know how to relax.”

Burt laughed again.

“That feeling of needing to be the right version of myself around him became my ‘normal’ and when he wasn’t around, I didn’t feel right. I didn’t know how to be me. I knew how to be a NYADA student. I knew how to be a Vogue employee. I knew how to be a singing waiter. I knew how to be Rachel’s best friend. I knew how to be the arbitrator and negotiator between fighting friends. I knew how to be Blaine’s boyfriend. But I didn’t know how to be me. I was breaking free from his hold when you brought him at Christmas. I was stupid and returned to Lima for the Valentine’s wedding-that-wasn’t. I got pulled back in, but still left with him knowing that we weren’t back together. I went back to New York and without him around, I actually made some
“You had friends already.”

“You had friends already.”

“Not exactly. I had people who had a lot of expectations of me who didn’t give me anything in return.”

“Amen. Sorry to butt in, but that’s the truth of it. He put up with our bullshit and he was the glue that kept everything together, but no one did the same for him. I’m ashamed that I fall into that category.”

“I don’t want to get into that now. You already apologized.”

Sam nodded.

“In New York, I started casually dating Adam after I started at NYADA. He was this ray of sunshine. He complimented me, he really seemed to enjoy spending time with me, and he did kind things with no expectation of some giant thank you or grand gesture in return. He fell in love with me. I wasn’t ready. I had things I needed to work through still. Rachel’s presence and then Santana’s continued to draw my attention to Lima. You were going through the cancer treatments. I was working a ton of hours and taking extra classes to get caught up more quickly. I couldn’t give him what was right. I was being pulled in too many directions to be a good partner, but he loved me. He was patient. He knew what I was going through and never pushed. He would just sit with me and let me lean against him while I read, knowing that I didn’t have a minute of time to actually interact with him, but he wanted to be with me enough that he would come over and just keep me company. He would rub my shoulders or my feet sometimes. He’d make me tea and biscuits, meaning cookies. He was British. He was too perfect. I kept feeling like it was some sort of big trap. That I’d fall for him and find out he wasn’t who he seemed to be.”

“So, he was too nice.”

“As weird as that sounds. I wasn’t accustomed to anyone being nice like that. I never had anyone go completely out of their way to do something special for me who wasn’t expecting something equally or more grand in return or didn’t do it as an apology to guilt me into forgiving them. Adam and I had been dating casually for about two months when I went back to Lima after your final treatment. I spent all of my time in Lima being shoved back into Blaine’s arms. He was everywhere, being charming and apologetic and that ‘normal’ feeling came back. Everyone was on his side, even YOU. You knew I had been broken up with him for 6 months, but you drove me to an engagement spectacle. He had everyone I had ever known and people I didn’t even know there. Everyone supported him. That was my ‘normal’. ‘Normal’ was that Blaine was amazing and I was lucky he wanted me. I said yes. My world went back to the status quo. I didn’t even get a chance to tell Adam myself. The gossip chain at NYADA got to him before I did. And when I did – God, the look in his eyes – I broke his heart and my own. At that moment, I wanted nothing more to say that I had said ‘yes’ because I didn’t know how to say ‘no’ and that I wanted him to take me far away so I could be with him. I stood looking into the eyes of a man who loved me for who I was, and all I could say was ‘I’m sorry.’ He had tears streaming down his face. Looking back, I think he knew. He knew that I didn’t know how to break free. He didn’t hate me. He continued to be kind to me. Later Rachel told me that he had asked her to tell me not to come back to the Apples, which seemed reasonable. And it didn’t take long for Blaine to go back to his self-focused ways. I sent him a plane ticket to come see the opening night of Pamela Lansbury – you know the band I started. It was about a month after the engagement, but he blew it off because my band meant nothing to him. He was always confrontational about it. He was jealous of Elliott. He confronted Elliott and laid claim to me telling Elliott that I was HIS in no uncertain terms.”
“Wait, was the plane ticket refundable or did he pay you for it?” Burt asked.

“No, neither. Anyway, I am working to view my life through non-warped lenses. I mean after numerous discussions on why Blaine wouldn’t wear an engagement ring that always ended with ‘I asked you so you’re the one that should wear the ring.’ And a very, very long list of other things that were never resolved that were equally lopsided, but came to feel ‘normal’ – I’m trying to sort through everything and figure out who I am. I don’t have an answer to that right now. I’m not Blaine’s boyfriend. I’m not Rachel’s best friend. My only friends now are Sam and Mercedes. I won’t be speaking to the rest of them.”

Kurt took a deep breath and closed his eyes for a minute.

“I have gone way, way off topic. The topic was why I was watching shows you like. I’m trying to be a better person. I’m trying to correct things about myself while figuring out who I am and how to be better or different when I find things about myself I don’t like. So, trying to watch what you like is a part of that.”

Burt nodded in understanding. “So, you two are heading back tomorrow and you’re going to live with Sebastian and you’re both going to work at Vogue part time and then Sam will be working full time next semester?”

“That’s right. His apartment is on the Upper West Side.”

“I don’t know what that means,” Burt said.

“Oh, sorry. It means that my commute to work will be a 15 minute subway ride instead of a 45 minute subway ride.”

“That’s good.”

“I think the apartment is probably about a half-mile or so from to Central Park.”

Sam said, “I think that will help me a lot. The last time I live in New York, I just didn’t like how crowded it was everywhere. Too many people, too many buildings, not enough space. But living that close to Central Park, I could jog to the park in about 5-10 minutes, depending on how long it takes to get across the streets. And I can escape for a while. I think maybe I can find a balance this time or at least I hope so.”

“Well, it sounds like this apartment is in a better location for both of you.”

“It definitely is,” Kurt said. “It’s probably not bigger than the loft, but it has real rooms – two bedrooms, with their own bathrooms and decent closets in the bedrooms, and a washer and dryer in the unit. I won’t have to haul my laundry anywhere anymore.”

“That will be handy,” Carole said.

“Definitely. And it has two large closets in the main area. Each one has a vertical bike hanger in it. Sebastian said the units were redesigned for young professionals. It also has a decent kitchen. No upper cabinets, but enough lower cabinets for it to be functional.”

“Sounds like you’ll be able to cook a lot more easily then.”

“Definitely. I like the idea of two bathrooms as well. The walls are the biggest plus. I would totally love the loft idea if I lived with only a boyfriend. The lack of walls and doors was a huge frustration when we had so many people coming and going.”
“I can imagine,” Carole said.

Kurt picked up his knife and twirled it, which was the signal that he had come up with for Sam to leave.

“I’m going to go fill my gas tank up so we don’t have to do that in the morning. And I’ll see if I can bring one of those trolleys up so I can start to stack our stuff on it,” Sam said.

“Oh, that’s a good idea, Sam,” Carole said.

“I want to talk to you both about the house in Lima. I know you don’t want to think about this, but I won’t be moving back to Lima. You’re empty nesters now. I can’t even begin to explain the guilt I currently feel for wanting to go to such an expensive school. I was enamored with the idea of a place where I could be myself, where I could perform. I let myself fall into Rachel’s loony idea that only NYADA would provide me the tools I needed to succeed on Broadway. And even after all of that, I haven’t been able to actually be myself. Don’t get me wrong – I’ve learned a lot and I’ve improved in so many areas. But it’s come at a high price. And trying to transfer to a different school with only three semesters left is hard to do.”

“I see.”

“I know that it has cost you way too much and I have gone into a lot of debt as well. Please don’t keep the large house with four bedrooms, the office, the family room, and all those bathrooms. The house served its purpose. Finn and I had our own spaces. We finally managed to merge as family only because everyone had enough room to be on their own as well, but now it’s just the two of you. A house with a nice master suite and a decent guest room will be plenty for the future. Maybe an office in the master suite or a small third bedroom that can be used as an office. But the added expense of heating and cooling such a large place and the upkeep required just doesn’t make sense.”

Carole was the first to respond. “We know and the two of us have talked about it quite a bit, actually. It’s just really hard to move away from the memories we have there.”

“I know. We moved out of the only place I had memories of my mom in. I know how hard it is. But Dad’s not going to have his congressional income and I don’t know whether you’re planning to go back to work again. And the added expenses just don’t make sense. If I could undo some of the things I chose, I might very well do it.”

“Honey, there is one thing that you don’t know about. Finn had a college fund that I had been putting money into. Since Burt won’t have his extra income to help with your tuition next year, we are going to use the money I had put aside for Finn to help you next year instead. I don’t want you to feel bad because this is what I want to do. You’ve already incurred so much debt that we’ve talked about it a lot the last couple of weeks. After you told us that Blaine never helped and Sam thought he was covered so he never did either, we realized that you have had way too much weight on your shoulders. There have to be things that will be really important during your final year and we want you to be able to focus on those, and if you’re working non-stop when you’re not in school or doing required schoolwork, you won’t have time to be a part of them.”

“Finn only went to school for a semester. Carole had put back enough for him to go to OSU Lima or LCC for a full four years while living at home. We’ll have enough to pay all of your tuition next year.”
“I don’t know what to say.”

“Then just listen for a little while, honey.” She reached out and took his hand. “Burt and I had already talked about putting the house on the market and looking for a smaller place before you came back to Lima. We didn’t want to try to move while you were living with us again. We had originally thought you’d be staying through the whole semester when you came home, so we opted not to put the house up for sale when we were going to in September. We wanted you to be able to have people over, and well, never mind that. It seems that those people won’t be part of your life any time soon. My family isn’t in Lima. You already know that though. And Burt doesn’t have any family in Lima either. We’ve considered selling the shop and looking for a shop that’s for sale somewhere not too far away, like maybe near Toledo or Dayton or even Columbus. Being in Lima is bittersweet for me, but more bitter than I thought. I’m having a hard time moving on when I see people that Finn was friends with. Anyway,” she wiped tears from her eyes, “we were already planning to sell the house.”

Burt took over. “I won’t just close the shop. I need to find someone to buy it. I don’t want to put people I care about out of work. So, we may end up selling the house and living in a one-bedroom apartment similar to this for a while and keep some stuff in storage until we figure out what we’re going to do.”

“That’s why the air mattress made sense.”

“Yeah and that tent you ordered for it is really nice. It makes it more private even though it’s in a joint living area.”

“Whatever you decide for yourselves is fine with me. You could choose to move to some other state even. Other than my mother being buried there, nothing is tying me to Lima. I would honestly probably visit you more if you didn’t live in Lima. Zanesville is nice and I know you have family there. It’s probably an hour from the airport in Columbus, maybe a little less.”

Carole had quit crying and started talking again. “There are a lot of things to figure out. When I go home next weekend, I’ll go through your room. I’ll photograph whatever I find and email you the pictures. Whatever you want to keep, you can just tell me and I’ll pack it up. If it’s stuff you want in New York, I can either mail it or bring it back with me here and you can come get it. We’ve decided to have Christmas here. So, you can get the stuff then if you haven’t already.”

“That’s fine.”

“So you and Sam are going to leave really early tomorrow morning?”

“Yeah, we want to get there in time to get our stuff unloaded and put away. Isabelle wants me to start tomorrow afternoon, so we need time to get there and get everything up to the apartment, and we can’t count on there being any trolleys like there are here. There is an elevator, so that will help, but we may have to make numerous trips to get everything up to the apartment.”

“Hopefully, there’s a trolley or a cart of some sort,” Carole said. “Back to the house issue – we’ll be putting it on the market and I’m imagining it will sell by the new year. It’s a great house for a family with pre-teens and teenagers,” Carole said.

“It is,” Kurt agreed.

Sam knocked on the door. Kurt got up to let him in. He held the door open as Sam pushed in a trolley and then pulled one behind him. Carole started clearing the dinner plates.
“You two, go ahead and get those loaded up. I’ll do the dishes. You cooked. It was delicious, by the way.”

“I’m glad you liked it.”

Kurt grabbed one of the trolleys and pulled into the bedroom. Sam followed behind with the other. They loaded up the storage containers and hung the garment bags and a few things covered in trash bags from the rack across the top of the trolleys. They taped the storage drawers shut and stacked them on top of the storage boxes. Once they finished loading them, they pushed them into the dining room to take down to the truck the next morning.

They all four sat down and watched *X-Men: Days of Future Past*. Sam had picked it up at a Redbox thinking it would be something they could all enjoy and he was right.

Burt got up when the movie ended. “Give me a hug, kiddo.”

Kurt got up and hugged him. Carole stood up and hugged Kurt too. Burt moved on and gave Sam a hug, followed by Carole.

“You two take care of yourselves. I know you’re leaving before we’ll be up. I’m glad you stayed tonight though.”

“Me too, Dad. I’ll send some pictures once we’re settled in and I already gave you the address.”

Burt hugged Kurt a second time before he left the room.

“So, how did the talk about selling the house go?”

“Surprisingly well. They were actually already planning to do it, but put it off because I went back to Lima in September. They’re going to list it when they go back this weekend.”

“Oh, wow that’s quick.”

“I told them I wasn’t ever going back to stay. They’re thinking of selling the shop and buying one somewhere else. Carole isn’t coping well with seeing Finn’s friends around town all the time. I think that’s probably why she quit her job and comes here with Dad all the time now. And even though the house has good memories, being in it all alone has to have been hard on her.”

“I bet.”

“She had him cremated like his father, so she’s not tied to the area because of wanting to visit his grave or anything. And her relatives live in central Ohio, not around Lima.”

“So, Burt’s going to sell the shop?”

“Yes. It’s weird. I feel bad in some ways. It was his dad’s shop and I know he always wished that I would want to take it over some day. I was good at fixing cars just like the two of them. And if living in Lima had been a pleasant experience for me, I might well have just ended up following in his footsteps. If he buys another shop somewhere else, who knows, I may still end up doing that some day. Even if I make it big, at some point, I might not want to be in the limelight forever. Who knows? Him giving up the shop is a lot harder for me to come to terms with than them selling the house. I only lived in that house for about a year and a half since I was at Dalton for so many months after they moved in. It was a nice house, but it doesn’t hold the memories that the shop
does. I spent so much time there growing up – probably more time than I spent at home, if you
don’t count when I was asleep.”

“It was something stable in your life when a lot of other things were out of control.”

“That too. Going in and taking an engine apart and putting it back together was something I could
do. I could see the end result of my hard work. I could take something that didn’t run and I could
fix it, even when there was nothing I could do to fix other parts of my life. Some days it was like
therapy I guess, looking back on it. I could put all my backbone and sweat into fixing something
and get that release that some people get from playing a sport or video games or something. It was
also something, I guess one of the few things I was ever actually convinced that I was good at, and
it was the only thing my dad and I really had in common.”

“You never talked about it. I only ever found out that you were good at it when I moved in with
you guys.”

“It was personal, sort of. It was this thing that was just mine that no one could take away from me.
Most everyone knew I worked for my dad. I just never changed their automatic assumption that it
meant that I ran the register or did customer service or something. I pulled away from that part of
myself when I started dating Blaine. No, that’s not true. I pulled away from it when he transferred
to McKinley. I started spending more time with him and less time at the shop. Talking to the
counselor is helping, but it brings up a lot of stuff that I thought I had let go or that I haven’t
thought about in a long time.”

Mine helped me a lot.”

“Yours helped me a lot. You getting help allowed you to help me. I can’t thank you enough for
that. And as much as I am frustrated by everything I’ve been through, I don’t hate Blaine. I have to
stay away from him when he comes to NYU. I’m going to have to figure out something to never be
alone on campus for a while. I don’t think I’m strong enough to stand on my own yet. I went back
to him after six months the first time, five months the second time. There is no way I’m where I
need to be to withstand an onslaught of his attention after just two months apart when he starts the
semester.”

“We’ll have to work on a plan. Maybe I can have my lunch from 1-2 and meet you on campus and
bring you back to the office.”

“That might work.”

“Given how invested Isabelle seems in having you there, she might just send a car to NYADA or
wherever you are every day at 1:30 to pick you up.”

“That might work too.”

“I just know that it won’t take long for him to get my schedule. No one knows he washed out.
Those letters go out to the student. There’s not a public list of who washed out. He can just waltz in
and talk to anyone he was friends with before and tell them that he decided to change programs
after taking a semester off. No one will be the wiser. And you know how charming he is.”

“Unfortunately, yes.”

“So, first order of business tomorrow is to get all that stuff in the truck. We’re leaving at 6:00 in
hopes of being away from big cities during the major morning rush. Hopefully, by 10:30, we’ll be
moving the stuff up to Sebastian’s apartment.”
“Are you really okay with moving in with him?”

“I am. I don’t think he’s going to be a bother. He’s been living on his own there for a nearly year and a half. I don’t think Isabelle would have been in favor of us giving it a try if she thought it would be a bad situation for me. She’s probably the only friend I have in the City. I don’t think she would steer me wrong intentionally. Sebastian seems completely determined to do well in his courses, so he’s very studious. We talked through a lot of things. And if things don’t work that well, we have our own room. We don’t have to spend time in the living area except to cook. The bedroom and bathroom are about the size of any place that we could afford on our own. And if it’s awful, we’ll start looking for a shoebox place of our own right away and move back out before the semester starts.”

“That seems reasonable. Going now gives us a chance to see if this will work before the real crunch of doing your internship as well as classes start up.”

“It does. We need to sleep.”

Sam faked snored. Kurt elbowed him and made him laugh.
Chapter 14

Sebastian was waiting for them when they pulled up to the building. He handed them the visitor’s parking pass and then waited for them by the door. He escorted them to the manager’s office and added their names as tenants in his apartment.

The manager copied their IDs, reminding them that they needed to get new ones with the appropriate address on them. He gave them a letter on the building letterhead indicating their new address so that they could get their driver’s licenses updated. He gave them a print out of the rules and regulations for the building, passcodes for the door, and keys to the apartment. He followed them out to Sam’s truck and took a photo of it and gave them a parking hangtag for the spot that went with the apartment. He reminded them to relicense the truck as well.

“I hate to bail on you, but I have class. I’ll be around this evening.”

“Thanks for everything,” Kurt said.

“You’re welcome.” He headed out the front of the building.

“Alright. Let’s get this stuff upstairs,” Sam said. “At least there’s a cart to use. I was hoping that Sebastian could stick around and just keep watch over the stuff while we made trips because we can’t leave the truck in the loading zone unattended. We can take turns I guess.”

They stacked the cart as full as was reasonable and Sam headed off into the building. About 20 minutes later, he was back. They loaded the cart again and Kurt took it up. They loaded the cart a third and final time.

“I’ll take this load up too. You can go park your truck in our assigned spot.”

Sam hopped in and drove off. Kurt took the last load upstairs. By the time Sam got upstairs, Kurt had unloaded the cart.

“We should probably take that back down. You can take it down and I’ll start sorting the boxes.”

When Sam came back up, Kurt had the hanging clothes in their closet and their coats hanging in the closet in the dining room.

“I think we need a shoe rack or two,” Kurt said as Sam came in their room.

“Sure. If you think it will help.”

“Definitely. Also, look,” Kurt pointed. “Sebastian got us a desk and a bookcase.”

“That was nice.”

“It was. That will really help. I won’t have to spend money on one. Let’s see how quickly we can get these totes emptied.”

They spent the next hour putting things in the dresser, the closets, on the bookshelf, and in the bathroom.

“I think we could use one set of the plastic drawers we bought in the coat closet for hats and
scarves and gloves and maybe put the other one in the bathroom for our, meaning mostly my personal hygiene products, and cleaning products.”

“That would work. Since we have the dresser now, we don’t need them for our socks and underwear and stuff. I’ll put mine in the bathroom under the sink.”

Kurt carried his out to the closet and put it inside.

“I’m pretty sure that I don’t own much of anything that is suitable to wear to work at Vogue. Can you look through what I have and pick the best thing? I’ll have to work on getting more work clothes.”

“The one thing you’ll need first and foremost is a pair of dress shoes that is actually comfortable, even if you have to spend half of your first paycheck to buy them. As the go-fer, you could be running errands around Manhattan or just inside the building, but either way, you’re going to be walking a lot and Chucks or sneakers are not going to be suitable. I guess you could make an anti-fashion fashion statement by wearing a nice outfit with black slacks and your new bright blue Chucks. If you wear them everyday, they could be like your signature piece.”

“That could be fun. I’ll do it for today and see how many eye rolls I get. I need to take a shower and get ready. Pick my best option, please.”

“I’ll do that. I need to get ready too. Let’s stack the rest of these containers against the wall over here and start getting ready. We’ll have to grab something to eat on the way there. Maybe Sebastian will want to go with us to Costco this evening when we get back. We can stock up on food and get shoe racks and laundry baskets.”

The very first thing out of Isabelle’s mouth was, “What are you wearing on your feet, Sam?”

“Shoes?”

“Definitely not.”

Kurt laughed.

“Oh no, Kurt,” this is definitely not a laughing matter,” she said as she could barely contain her laughter.

“I told him he could make a statement by wearing them.”

“If the statement is ‘I have no idea what I should wear on my feet,’ then he has succeeded. Follow me. I cannot have you walking around here like that.” She laughed. She led them into the vault.

“Over here, please. Try these on until you find a pair that’s comfortable and don’t come out until you do.”

Less than five minutes later, Sam was standing in Isabelle’s doorway. Kurt looked down at Sam’s feet and laughed. “$1200 Ferragamo black sneakers?”

Isabelle stood up so that she could see Sam’s feet. She just shook her head. “Fine, you’re adorable. It works for you. At least no one can complain that they aren’t designer. I’ll take you down to the Art Department. You can let Kurt keep your neon blue shoes under his desk for the day.”

Sam handed his shoes to Kurt, who slipped them in his office quickly and caught up to the two of
them. They dropped Sam off at his destination and he was whisked away to learn his job. He gave
them a smile and a wave as they walked away.

“Are the Ferragamo black desert boots in there up for grabs? I could use those schlepping around
the city. I’ve decided to try out a more casual look around campus this year.”

“Sure. Take them. Sam can have the tan ones if he wants them. That shoot was aimed at a younger
crowd than typically has access to the vault, so they’re not likely to be in high demand.”

“The Thom Browne plaid boots?”

“Yours. Sebastian took the dark gray ones. I think the pinstripe ones are in there still.”

“I like the plaid ones better.”

“Take them. You know those kinds of styles come and go quickly. Someone should wear them
before they go out of style.”

Kurt laughed. “So, what’s on today’s agenda?”

“Therein lies the issue. I need an agenda. I need you to go fix the disaster that is my calendar.
Rearrange it. Make it make sense. Dorothy was a nice girl, but executive order and organization
were not her strong suits. Please, go make me an organized executive.”

By this point, she was being so melodramatic, Kurt couldn’t help but laugh. “Yes, my dear
Isabelle. One organized calendar coming up. I don’t know how long this will take.”

“Just fix it. Fix me,” she continued melodramatically.

“As you wish…” he bowed at the waist slightly, teasing her.

She play smacked him on the arm. “God, I’m glad you’re back.” She flounced off to her office.

Kurt and Sam entered the apartment to find Sebastian sitting at the dining table, eating dinner.

“I wasn’t sure when you two would be back.”

“I think probably about 6:30 as long as we catch the subway right away. If we have to wait, 6:45, I
guess.”

“I see that Isabelle has gifted you both with new shoes. I have the gray ones like those, mine look
like they’re made out of the fabric a gray pea coat would be made out of.”

“These are the same type of fabric, just in plaid. I thought they looked fun. And the others are
more utilitarian. I’ve decided to try out a new more casual look.”

“Well, that will be a big change. I know I haven’t seen you really since two and a half years ago,
but back then you were definitely into the haute couture look with multiple layers. I don’t think
I’ve ever seen you in a short-sleeved shirt.”

“Well, times are changing. I’m changing, or at least trying to.”

“Been there, still there sometimes. But I’m better. The therapist Isabelle found for me has really
helped.”
I’ve been talking to one from NYADA over the phone the last few weeks while I wasn’t in town. I’ll start going in person this week. I have about six weeks of arming myself for the onslaught that I’m not currently able to defend myself from.”

Sebastian furrowed his brows.

“Blaine is attending NYU next semester. It’s a 15-minute walk from NYU’s campus to NYADA. He’s never done anything to warrant a restraining order. I can’t keep him off campus or from waiting for me on a public sidewalk and attempt to talk to me. Anyway, enough about my messed up life. Do you want to go to Costco with us? We’re going to go buy groceries and a few things like laundry baskets.”

“Sure.”

“No rush. Enjoy your meal. I’m going to go change.”

“Me too,” Sam said.

About 10 minutes later, they came out. Kurt was in black jeans and the red Monty Python hoodie, wearing the new Ferragamo casual black boots. Sam had regular blue jeans on, a Hulk hoodie, and the tan boots like Kurt’s.

“Well, that’s different,” Sebastian said, looking at Kurt. “You like Monty Python?”

“Yeah.”

“I have some of the DVDs.”

“Cool,” Sam said. “What else do you like?”

“Doctor Who, Sherlock, some sci fi stuff, some of the superhero movies, Pixar movies, Big Hero 6 was cute. I like a lot of different things. It depends on my mood.”

“Betty White?” Kurt asked.

“Yes, actually.”

“So, it was a veiled compliment, not an insult.”

Sebastian laughed. “Come on. I’ve never been to a Costco. You can expand my shopping horizons.”

“Thank you for the desk and bookcase. That was very thoughtful and kind.”

“You’re welcome. I bought myself the same ones. I figured that I might need one as well. I saw these shoe storage units that look sort of like really narrow dressers. I’m going to get one and put it here next to the door. That way I can keep the shoes I wear the most frequently in here. I’m not big on wearing shoes once I’m home.”

“I love those shoe dressers. My old room was in our basement, so getting one would have made me have to drill into concrete, which my father did not approve of. And the new house they bought my room had only one blank wall and I had to use it for my dresser, so I never ended up getting one.”

“Well, with Sam’s truck, I can avoid the delivery fee, if he’s willing to drive there.”

“Sure. Let’s go. I’m hungry. Ikea or Costco first?”
“The food at Ikea is pretty good and it’s not expensive.”

“Then Ikea it is. You just need to tell me how to get there.”

“I think this one’s best. It’s got enough room that we can each put two pairs of shoes and a pair of boots.”

“It’s fine with me, if you’re trying to get me to voice an opinion.” Kurt said. It’s your place. You should get what you like.”

“This is from the same line as all of the other furniture I’ve bought. When I moved in, I just got everything from the same line. I figured that way, if I ever wanted to rearrange or use the pieces differently, everything would match. Simple.”

“Well, it looks good. Do you need anything else?” Kurt asked as he picked up the shoe storage unit and put it in the cart. “I think I’m going to go look at the desk lamps.”

“That’s a good idea,” Sebastian said. “I think that’s it though because we already grabbed desk drawer organizers.”

Sam pushed the cart and followed along behind them. They split up when they got to the lamps. Once Kurt and Sebastian found what they wanted, they looked for Sam and added their selections to the cart. Sebastian took a little longer than Kurt.

He laughed when he put his in. “I picked the same one as Kurt.”

“I looked for the least expensive one that I actually liked. I’m on a budget. I liked the way the light has a narrow focus. I thought it wouldn’t light up the whole room and bother Sam as much if I was still working on something when he wanted to sleep.”

“Let’s get going,” Sam said. “We still need to get to Costco. My budget can’t afford eating out all the time.” Sam pushed the cart to the checkout area.

“Neither can mine,” Sebastian said.

Kurt and Sam looked at him.

“I did get a cash distribution, but it’s really just enough to cover the utilities, fees, and groceries. I’m not complaining. Not at all. I just don’t have some kind of unlimited, go-out-to-eat-every-meal, drink-ridiculously-overpriced-coffee budget. It’s basically designed to be down to zero balance when I get the third part of my trust fund. But if the prices are good at Costco, I might have a little more leeway for splurges.”

“You shouldn’t have spent money on a desk and bookcase for me then.”

“Oh, that came out of a different fund. My father set up a separate account to furnish the apartment with. There’s still some money left in that account. It’s a joint account, so he gets the statements. He would see if I used it to buy groceries or go out to eat. I can’t withdraw cash from the account. I still have never bought anything to hang on the walls. So, I’m still not quite finished. Don’t worry about the furniture. If I ever sell the place, the additions will just add value to the place. I won’t take any of the furniture with me when I go back to France, whenever that will be. I haven’t decided whether I want to keep the apartment or sell it when I go back. Either way, the furniture will only add to the value. I can get more money from a furnished rental.”
“You could probably rent your place for $5000 a month.”

“That’s why I’ve considered keeping it, but the property taxes are really high to keep it just to have as a second residence. My father is paying those while I am in school and under 22. So, once I get the next installment of my trust fund, I’ll be paying for everything myself. Plus, being a landlord from another continent would be tough. I’d have to rent to someone I know.”

On the way to Costco, Sebastian started to talk again. “I found out some extraordinarily good news today, which is making me slide to the 90% sure I’m going to stay here to finish college.”

“What did you find out?” Kurt asked.

“I met with an academic advisor a while back – after we talked forever that one night. I never really paid much attention to the AP Exam stuff because Dalton talked about how at Ivy League schools they were mostly used to exempt students from classes so they could start a subject at a higher level rather than provide actual credit for classes. But when I was talking to her about my class standing and my courses for next semester, she quoted a higher number of credits than I had calculated. We looked at my list and hers to find the discrepancy. I have 12 credit hours I didn’t know I had, plus I could earn an additional 3 extra credits if I take a political science course next semester. I’ve been taking 18 credit hours per semester. So, if I take one course this summer, I can graduate next May.”

“Wow. That would be great. Is that what you’re going to do?”

“Yes. I already signed up for courses for next semester. I’m going to go back and see her again and make a final plan for next year and I’m going to try take the hardest class I have left this summer, but I’m pretty sure my hardest class is going to be my senior thesis paper and I don’t know if I can take that in the summer. I might take whichever two courses that require the most busy work to free up more time for the senior project next year.”

“I’ve taken dance courses the last two summers. Since I started NYADA in the spring, I missed the fall dance course and we’re not allowed to take two dance classes at the same time because they’re sequential. Then I took one last summer to make up for not taking one this semester, so I wouldn’t fall behind. I also took voice classes both summers because we can’t double up on those either.”

“That makes sense.”

“I’ve taken extra classes each semester like you have, but I’m down to 12 credit hours now because I didn’t think I could do a third academic course in 8 weeks on top of my other two. Doing two 8-week classes and the two I had is like taking 6 classes already. If I didn’t have to work at all, I probably could have taken another, but that’s not the case. I have to clean up whatever messes Isabelle’s four previous PA’s have made. I had 16 hours before I dropped the internship. I’m probably going to have to take classes next summer too.”

Sam pulled into the parking spot. They all got out and headed inside.

“Wow. It’s like an Ikea for food,” Sebastian said.

Sam laughed. “Pretty much. Kurt and I have only been to the one in DC, but this looks pretty much the same.”

They went through the store buying everything they needed.
“Get things you want too, Sebastian. Carole bought us a membership and can use our card for all of it. If our schedules line up, we could eat dinner together and split the cost of making the meals. That would probably cut down on your costs, but that’s only if you like the things we make. You can try them this week and then we can talk about it over the weekend.”

“Sounds good.” Sebastian started picking up a few things. “It’s hard to shop in a place like this as a single person unless you like to eat the same thing a lot of times. So, splitting meals might be a good option. I’m assuming you’re a good cook since you said you’ve been cooking since you were a little kid.”

They finished their shopping and headed back to the apartment. After they got the groceries put away, Kurt and Sam went back to their room to finish unpacking their stuff. Kurt decided that he was too tired to attempt to get any of his schoolwork done that evening.

Kurt was up early the next morning. He quietly grabbed a carton of yogurt and a breakfast bar and sat up to his desk to get started on the assignments that were due that week. He heard Sebastian get up about an hour later. He went out to talk to him.

“Can you please make a schedule for me of when you have class, when you’re usually home, and when you usually do your schoolwork? I need to get a schedule worked out for me as well. And I don’t want to do anything that conflicts with your schedule.”

“I’ll get that done by tonight, if that’s okay.”

“That’s great. Thanks.”

Sam came out and went in the kitchen and made a bowl of cereal and sat down at the table with the other two. “I’ll help you put that shoe dresser unit together if you want. Or if you’re busy, I can just do it myself.”

“We can do it together. I’m sure it will go a lot faster. I’ve put the rest of this stuff together by myself. Many a weekend has been spent assembling furniture.”

“Well, I’m going to go back and work on my essay. I have a 5-7 page French essay due on Friday.”

By the end of the week, the three of them had fallen into a rhythm that worked. Everyone was still operating on their best behavior with each other, but they were starting to relax a little. Kurt had seen Sebastian’s eyes light up when he put the Doctor Who DVDs in the TV cabinet.

When he got up Saturday morning, Kurt made a pan of brownies and blondies. He let them cool, cut them up, and stored them for the evening. He also put a whole package of chicken wings in a marinade in the refrigerator. He peeled carrots, and sliced them and prepped celery. He made a dip and stored it.

Once he was done, he went back in his room to work on his schoolwork. He had fallen behind from where he had hoped to be, but he wasn’t actually behind yet. He had just hoped to have the whole day free.

Once he finished the necessary assignments, he went back out to the kitchen and made sandwiches and packed them. He filled their water bottles, put three blondies in a storage container, and packed a bag of Sun Chips in a backpack. He started breakfast for the other two. Once he was done, he
went and woke them both up.

He knocked on Sebastian’s door first.

“Hmm?” Sebastian got up and answered the door.

“I made you breakfast.”

“Oh. That was nice. Thanks.”

Kurt went in his room and got Sam up. The two of them sat down at the table and ate what Kurt had made for them.

“I’ve lived here two years and no one would go to the zoo with me, so I’m inviting you to go to the zoo with me. If you don’t want to go, I’ll just leave your lunch here for you and go by myself. I’ve spent two years waiting for other people to do things with me and just gave up going when no one wanted to go. I’m not going to do that anymore. I won’t be upset if you don’t come, but you’re welcome to join me.”

Sebastian asked, “You made us lunches?”

“I did. I made sandwiches and blondies, and I packed Sun Chips and water.”

“What are blondies?”

“They’re like brownies, but vanilla instead of chocolate.”

“Oh. Sounds good. I’ll go.”

“You can count me in,” Sam said.

Kurt smiled. “I’m going to go do more homework, but I’ll be ready to go at 1:00.”

Kurt came out at 12:45 wearing dark gray jeans, his Doctor Who hoodie, and the plaid boots. Sebastian was getting used to the new more laid back version of Kurt’s wardrobe, but he was clearly surprised that he was dressed so casual for an outing. He was sitting on the sofa reading a textbook, wearing a Columbia hoodie, regular Levi’s and the pair of gray boots that he had gotten from Isabelle. Sam was sitting on the other side of the sectional wearing dark wash jeans, the Storm Trooper hoodie, and the tan dessert boots he got from Isabelle.

“Well, I have bad news. I went online to double-check which subway to take and found that the Central Park Zoo is not open this time of year. It closed for the season about three weeks ago, but I have chosen an alternate destination – the Houdini Museum. It’s free and it just seemed like something fun to go see. I want to go to the Museum of Natural History one Saturday and spend the whole there, but obviously I couldn’t do that today since I had schoolwork to do. So, I apologize for the sudden change in plans, and like I said earlier, you don’t have to come if you don’t want to. I don’t think it’s very big, but it might be cool.”

Sam stood up. “I’m in.”

“Me too.” Sebastian put his book on the shelf next to where he had been sitting.

Kurt went in the kitchen and packed the sandwiches he had made in the backpack with the other items. He pulled a coat out of the closet, put it on, and then put the backpack on. The other two
were waiting by the door already. Sebastian opened the door and ushered the other two out and locked the door.

They returned to the apartment around 5:00. Once they had gotten their coats hung up, Kurt said, “There will be a Doctor Who 10th Doctor marathon starting at 7:00. I’ve prepped chicken wings, celery, carrots, and dip, brownies, and at some point there will be fresh popcorn. If either of you wants to join me, you know where to find me.” He headed to his room to get more homework done and closed the door behind him.

Sam and Sebastian were still standing in the living room.

“Hey, Sebastian, do you have time to talk for a bit?”

“Um, sure.”

Sam walked toward the sofa and Sebastian followed him after he took his boots off and put them in the storage unit. He sat down and criss-crossed his legs.

“What’s up?”

“Kurt’s obviously trying really hard to get you to relax. He got up early, and prepped all that stuff. He made us breakfast, packed us lunch, and prepped stuff to make us for dinner too.”

“You think he’s trying to get me to relax? I figured that he feels guilty because he’s not paying rent and so he’s just doing nice stuff for me to make it more even somehow.”

“I don’t think so. I think he’s really trying to show you that he’s accepted your apology and that things are fine.”

“What makes you think that?”

“You still act like you’re ashamed and you’re hesitant to say anything to him that’s not neutral or complimentary. Like you’re walking on eggshells.”

“I don’t want to be that guy again. I made things worse for him. Why would he forgive me so easily?”

“Because that’s how he is. He’s a very forgiving person. And the longer you keep acting like you have something to apologize for, the longer he’s reminded about what happened. You need to let it go.”

“Easy for you to say.”

“Actually no. I’ve done much worse to him than you ever did. I was the first male friend he had that he trusted. According to him, my friendship meant the world to him. He says me being his friend proved to him that there were decent guys our age. And I ruined that. I fucking ruined that.” Tears streamed down Sam’s cheeks. He wiped his eyes. “You were never his friend. From his perspective, you sided with Blaine from the beginning – like everyone else. That wasn’t unusual. That was the status quo. He was always told that he wasn’t good looking, that he wasn’t desirable, that he was too feminine, and that he dressed ridiculously. And later after he started dating Blaine, he was repeatedly told how lucky was to have Blaine. The things you said were just echoes of the rest of the people in his life. But me, I wasn’t like that with him. Blaine and I weren’t friends. I was friends with Kurt. When I came back to Lima, I LIVED with Kurt. His family took me in. We were
like brothers. I saw a side of him that no one saw. He let me into his life in a way that he had never let anyone in, even Blaine. He joked with me. We did stupid stuff together like spraying each other with the hose instead of watering the flowers. I saw him with bedhead, wearing ratty comfortable pajamas, rather than the silk ones he wore when other people were around. He opened his heart to me, not in a romantic way, but in a real friendship way.” He wiped more tears. “And when he went to New York, I was really lonely. I was in high school for a fifth year. He was the only one that knew it. I never talked about my classes and I was a transfer student, so I think no one ever thought about what grade I was in. He tutored me when I came back, and it helped, but I hadn’t been going to school when I was in Kentucky and I was too far behind to catch up when I went back to McKinley. Anyway, I was really lonely. And two weeks after he left, Blaine cheated on him. He was distraught. He quit talking to anyone in Lima. He just shut himself off. When Blaine told me that he had cheated on Kurt, I told him that he needed to forgive himself and move on. I convinced him to stay at McKinley rather than go back to Dalton when the Warblers tried to get him back. At first, I was trying to be a good friend to Kurt by keeping Blaine’s attention off of him. Blaine went nuts with sending Kurt flowers, and gifts, and more gifts. He’d call and leave ‘I’m sorry messages.’ He texted Kurt repeatedly apologizing. I thought if I could keep him occupied, Kurt could move on. I had never liked Blaine, like not at all. I felt like all he did was steal the spotlight from all of the guys, but especially Kurt. Whenever Kurt had an opportunity, he would share it with Blaine, but whenever Blaine came up with an idea, he’d sing on his own. Kurt quit even trying. Blaine took Tony. He gave you our set list. He spent time with you against Kurt’s wishes. He made it seem like you were the one always texting him, so he didn’t want to be rude and not answer. He pushed the real Kurt further and further inside.” He paused. “Kurt was this amazing bold person whose uniqueness could be seen from outer space. Blaine tamed him and Kurt lost a lot of his Kurt-ness.”

Sebastian laughed. “He was ‘toned down’ when I met him?”

“Oh, yeah.”

Sebastian laughed and shook his head. “What was he like before?”

“I’ll show you some videos at some point. Anyway, there is a long list of reasons why I never liked Blaine. Then somehow, while trying to keep his focus off of Kurt, I got whammied by Blaine when he turned his attention on me. I realized this summer, that I was clinically depressed by that point. I fell prey to the Blaine-effect, which is what I call his overwhelming ability to charm everyone he meets.” Sam went on to explain everything that had gone on from right after the break up until everyone from Lima had left the city the previous May. “For two years, I screwed up. I caused him more pain than you ever did and how does he treat me?”

“Like you’re his best friend. Like he loves you.”

“Stop being stand-offish. Don’t hold back when you want to joke or tease. He has a great sense of humor and he’s really funny. He’s not even remotely stuffy or uptight once you get past the armor he wears. The thing is, he’s letting it down intentionally with you. He’s talking to you. He’s putting forth an effort to befriend you. He hasn’t done that with anyone in since his first semester at NYADA. The few friends that he made when he came here are gone, mostly because of Blaine after they got back together. Kurt started a band his first semester at NYADA and they were really good. Blaine hated it. Kurt sent him a plane ticket to come see their first gig. Blaine didn’t use it. He didn’t even call. Kurt called him to make sure he was okay since he was late. He was still in Lima.”

“Seriously?”
“Yep. That was maybe a month after they’d gotten back together, I think. Originally, Santana and Rachel were in the band with Kurt and two other people. Kurt kicked Rachel and Santana out when they kept fighting. But Kurt and the other two were still really good together. I’ll show you those videos later too.”

“Okay.”

“After Kurt got bashed last winter, Blaine went after him in combat class the first class he attended after he got out of the hospital. He couldn’t stand how Kurt was changing. Wrong topic. The list of things Blaine did isn’t the topic of this conversation, except in the round about way that he went back to Blaine after they had been separated TWICE. The engagement was after they had been broken up for 6 months. The wedding was after they had been broken up for 5 months. He forgives too easily. He’s forgiven me for abandoning our friendship. When I apologized, he took me back. He let me back into his life. You need to accept his forgiveness and move forward. The longer you half-reject it, the longer he will think us living here is some kind of penance on your part and it seems to me that you could actually use a couple of friends.”

Sebastian nodded. “I just don’t feel like I deserve it.”

“That’s a problem for you to work on with your therapist. Try to move on. You’ve given him a chance to be with someone who cares about him – me. And you given us a place to live that won’t require him to take out another school loan next semester. He accepted that from you and he’s not the type to accept help from people or ask for it. When it comes time for his Doctor Who marathon, please try to relax and have fun. He just recently bought them and it’s something he would have NEVER bought when Blaine was around because he thought it was stupid.”

“I LOVE Doctor Who. I’ll think about what you said. I felt like he’s been extra nice as payment for letting him stay here and I didn’t realize that him staying here is actually hard on him in a convoluted kind of way.”

“He’s only been burned when he’s let himself get close to people or attempted to rely on people. So, moving in here actually took a huge leap of trust on his part. You said you had changed, but he risked being criticized and bad-mouthed every day. He didn’t know if he could take you at your word. And given your previous behavior, the odds weren’t good. But he needed to be here and he took a risk. I know part of it was for me.”

“What do you mean?”

“He knows that I don’t want to go live with my parents in Kentucky and he knows that I don’t have enough money to go live somewhere on my own right now. By agreeing to move in here with you, he’s providing me a place to live too, and a job by way of Isabelle not wanting him to be alone here. I’m sure there are over a hundred people who would kill to have the job I have. I’m sure there were tons of applicants that didn’t get the positions who would gladly take them now, but Isabelle used her influence to get me the positions instead. He told me that if I took the job and came with him that by the time the jobs ends, I’ll have enough saved up to move out of the city and start over again somewhere more suited to my tastes. He gave you a chance to give me a chance, if that makes any sense. It also works the other way for him. By bringing me, he created a potential buffer in a potential danger zone. If it turned out that you hadn’t really changed, he would at least have me here.”

“That’s very complicated.”

“He’s been through a lot. He didn’t want to live in the dorm. Shared showering is not something that has gone well for him in the past. Dropping that internship and picking up two new classes
cost him a lot of money. He didn’t get any refund on the tuition for the 10 credit hours he dropped, and then he had to enroll in 6 more credit hours and had to pay for four at the higher by-the-credit-hour rate because his total for the semester went over the 18 that his tuition covers. It took me a bit to understand that because the freaking tuition is like $25,000 a semester. But it is what it is. College seems like a huge scam to me. But places want people to have college degrees, so it sucks. I honestly can’t figure out how spending over $200,000 on a piece of paper from a prestigious school is so much better than spending $40,000 for the same degree from a less prestigious school. I mean I understand that the more expensive school probably gets their pick of the professors. He’s going to be paying back loans on top of the cost of living here for 10 years after he gets out of school. By the time you add the interest in, who knows how much it all ends up coming to. In the same length of time, he could have put all that money into a really, really nice house and car somewhere and at 34 or whatever, he would have had a house that’s paid for and very low living expenses. Now, at 34, he’ll have just finished paying off the school loans. It just doesn’t seem reasonable. Anyway, that’s not what we were talking about. I seem to be the king of tangents tonight.”

Sebastian laughed. “It’s okay. We haven’t talked much and this gives me a chance to get to know you better.”

“Back to the real topic at hand. I think we’re going to be okay – IF you can relax and move forward. He trusted you enough to move in. Trust him when he says that he’s forgiven you. Let it go. Be his friend now. He’s an amazing friend, if you give him a chance.”

“I will. Thanks for talking to me and not putting it off until I mess things up again.”

“Are you going to Ohio for Thanksgiving?”

“I have to make an appearance at the Smythe family Thanksgiving dinner at Great Grandmother Smythe’s house. Isabelle is going with me. She went with me last year too, as moral support. She’s beautiful, rich, and famous and still not good enough for my father, so I’ll be in good company. Plus, she LOVES to irritate my father, so sitting with me and talking with me all throughout the meal pleases her to no end because my father hates it that she likes me.”

“I see.”

“It ticked him off so much when she was raving about how she had FINALLY found a good PA and then she talked about Kurt. He knows Kurt is gay and he dislikes Congressman Hummel. So, she had a grand time extolling Kurt’s magnificence and how much she missed having an efficient PA after she saw how much he was irritated by it.”

“They sound like children.”

“It is childish, but my father is an ass, so I’m Team Isabelle.”

Sam laughed. “Shouldn’t some of the stuff you mentioned is on the list to be inherited – shouldn’t it go to Isabelle? She’s just as much an heir as your father.”

“Oh, no. She’s female. My father is my late Great Grandfather Smythe’s son’s son. Isabelle is Great Grandfather Smythe’s daughter’s daughter. She was given monetary support to attend the university of her choice and she was given the money to rent a place while she was in college, but then it was her job to marry into money to build up the fortunes of two already rich families. She is single. She made her own fortune. But no, she will not inherit any of the Smythe family fortune. She is a Wright. She will inherit from her own father’s holdings, which are significant because Great Grandfather Smythe would never have allowed Isabelle’s mother to marry beneath her.”
“I see. An arranged marriage, or at most a limited-selection of men to choose from.”

“You got it. But she has yet to marry or produce an heir, so in the end I don’t know what will happen to the Wright inheritance. I suppose when both of her parents die, she will get it? I’m not sure.”

“All of that stuff is completely foreign to me. When are you leaving and coming back?”

“I’m leaving very early Thursday morning, returning late that night. I’m not staying any longer than required.”

“We’re not going anywhere. Kurt will be ambushed if we go to Lima. How is the security here?”

“It’s good. I’ve never had any trouble. No one is allowed to make deliveries to the apartments themselves, if you’re afraid that he’ll try to pass himself of as a delivery man.”

“That’s good. I’m most concerned about when Kurt’s at NYADA. He needs to find some people willing to stick by between classes. And maybe even someone to walk him to the subway when he leaves to go to the retirement center.”

“Do you think he will do something to Kurt?”

“Weasel his way back into Kurt’s heart. I just told you that he forgives too easily. He’s seeing a good counselor this time, so it should help. And he has us, who will take his side. At least I hope you will.”

“Yes. I’m not going to play Blaine’s game when he comes back next semester. I’m sure he’ll have the charm turned up to mega-charming, but I’m not interested. I wasn’t interested back then. I don’t know what Kurt told you…”

“Just that you were sorry for what you had done and that he had accepted your apology and that he forgave you.”

“All of what I did was just purely to pick on Kurt. It was pure and simple malicious behavior on my part. I hated my life. When he and I met, I already knew who he was, but I made a whole lot of wrong assumptions. And I thought he had a huge group of real friends, a loving boyfriend who was an attention hog, but Kurt didn’t seem to mind – and he looked completely able to get his own attention from all of his friends. He had a dad who loved him despite the fact that he was gay. From the outside, Kurt looked like he had it all – everything I didn’t have. I had no one. I knew nothing about being an American, but since I had no foreign accent, everyone assumed that I did. My mother had been killed in an accident. I had been forced to move in with my father and his wife, who didn’t want me there. I had to break up with the guy I loved because there was no way to maintain a decent relationship with someone who was in France. With a 6-hour time difference, I would have only been able to actually speak with Pascalle on the weekends. It just didn’t seem fair to him. I wanted Pascalle to be happy, even though it broke my heart. I intentionally lashed out at ‘perfect Kurt’ with his ‘perfect life’. I said some pretty awful things to him. I baited him. I told him that by the end of the school year, I’d have Blaine and he’d have a Lima Bean apron.”

“He was going through a really rough time then. When you two first met, I wasn’t in Lima. I was still in Kentucky then, but I found out what had happened after I went back to Lima.”

“Yeah. I was just another person flogging an injured horse. Venting my own anger about my life and taking it out on him because it was convenient and fun.”

“That was nothing new. You were just one in along line of bullies. He forgave Puck, Finn, and
even Karofsky. He’ll forgive Blaine too. That’s the biggest problem I see. Blaine has already learned how to wait Kurt out. Gently pulling Kurt back to him with the ‘I won’t push you. I just want to spend time with you.’ – until Kurt lets his guard down.”

“Well none of that this time. I’m going to take what you said to heart and be the best friend I can be. I’ll get my therapist to help me with how to be a good friend to someone who’s been in an emotional abusive situation. I’m going to ask you a blunt question. Are you in love with him?”

“Maybe, but I would never act on it. I’m definitely not gay and I’m not bi. Looking at naked guys does nothing for me. I even watched some gay porn to see how it made me feel, which wasn’t turned on like straight porn. I went to Columbus and did some experimenting. He doesn’t know about any of this. And despite the fact that physical contact is physical contact, the attraction wasn’t there despite the fact that the guy was very attractive by society’s standards.”

“So you went out to a gay bar and hooked up with someone?”

“Just dirty dancing, kissing, and a hand job for him. It was what it was. The guy wasn’t looking for a boyfriend, so I didn’t feel bad. He got what he was looking for and I got some answers.”

“I wasn’t judging. I was just curious.”

Sam nodded. “But I do love him, so it’s hard to answer. I’m not sure that I could get over the fact that male genitalia does not turn me on. He’s always seen me as his first and only straight male friend and I’ve always only seen myself as straight. So, could he be my ‘exception’ I suppose, but I love him too much as a person to find out that I couldn’t be a good lover to him. I can’t hurt him like that. I’ve already hurt him so much and he’s forgiven me and let me back into his life. I can’t do something like kiss him and start a romantic relationship to find out whether I’m sexually attracted to him enough to move past just kissing. He deserves someone who finds him irresistibly sexy and attractive.”

“I get that. He is incredibly hot. He always has been. At least since I’ve known him and he’s only gotten hotter as he’s gotten older.”

“He doesn’t think he’s attractive at all. That’s why being in a potential relationship with me would be a bad idea. I can’t honestly tell him how much he turns me on because it wouldn’t be true, even though I love him.”

“You mentioned earlier something about living with him and his family. Maybe when you bonded with him all that time ago, you were friends first, but then you became like his brother. That may have something to do with how deep your love is for him without it being romantic or sexual. I don’t have that type of bond with anyone in my family, but I have heard other people talk that way about a brother or sister.”

“Could be. My brother and sister are so much younger than I am and I haven’t lived with them much since I was 17 and they were 5 and 7. So, I’m not really close to them. But you have a point. It could just be that close family bond of love that I don’t have with anyone else that I have with him.”

“Greek has all of these different words for different types of love. From your description, I think how you feel about Kurt involves more than one of them, but not romantic love. You should look them up some time if you’re interested. English and French are lame with having so few words to describe something so important in life. In English, I can think of like 7 words that mean vomit and just one for love.”
Sam laughed.

“I’m really glad you kidnapped him. He needed to get away from Blaine.”

“I glad I did too. I only managed to see what I had let myself fall prey to once I got away from him and started therapy. God, I did some awful things.”

“One of them is something that you and I need to talk about.”

“What’s that?"

“What you and Blaine did nearly cost a group of innocent people their college admissions.”

“What do you mean?”

“When you two accused the Warblers of using drugs publicly by going to the Show Choir Board, rather than going to the Dalton Headmaster, all of the Warblers that were seniors were summarily sent rejection letters from the schools we had applied to, even those of us who had already gotten acceptance letters from early admissions. It cost our families a LOT of time and money to fight to get our admissions reinstated or to get the schools to consider our applications.”

“I didn’t realize.”

“That’s actually why I agreed to let Blaine host the proposal at Dalton. Trent spoke up and agreed to it as an effort to improve our ‘tarnished reputation’, but I knew that Blaine had cheated on Kurt. I knew they had been broken up for six months. I agreed because I was angry about what Blaine had done to us. I figured that Kurt would come in, see Blaine’s ridiculous spectacle and say ‘No fucking way, you cheater!’”

“Oh, wow. I didn’t know that anyone knew besides a few of the New Directions.”

“Well, public schools don’t have the market on gossip.”

“You’re right. We went about it all wrong. But that rule about people leaving the stage when there was a medical emergency was ridiculous. We should have been given the chance to regroup and perform.”

“That Mennonite group should have been the one to compete at Regionals in all honesty. I agree that the rule that disqualified your team because someone had a medical emergency on stage should have been addressed. But if rules are rules, and all of the Warblers were prevented from competing because SOME of the Warblers used steroids, then the rule that disqualified your whole team should have been upheld as well. The Mennonite group should have moved on to Regionals since they came in second at Sectionals. The New Directions didn’t even actually place at Sectionals. You were disqualified. We placed first. The Mennonite choir placed second. That was that. Your group benefited by getting some of the rules bent or overlooked, while those of us who did not participate in taking steroids had our lives turned upside down. We were taken to juvie. We were drug tested in juvie. Do you know where they look for drugs when you are taken in during a drug bust?”

“Oh, God.”

“Yeah. So, your determination to make it to Nationals one more time cost some of us a lot. Fortunately, most of the Warblers were minors and their records will be sealed as adults. But those of us unfortunate enough to have already been 18 or older had to fight to have our records expunged. My father already disliked me. That whole situation really sealed the deal. He thought
singing and dancing was stupid to start with and having to spend all that money just to keep me from having a criminal record over a show choir doping scandal so I could still get into Columbia made him really upset.”

“I had no idea. I’m really sorry. There’s nothing I can say beyond that. I can’t offer to reimburse your father for the cost of the legal fees.”

“There could have been scholarship students involved. Thankfully there weren’t, but their families couldn’t have fought it.”

“Well, I’m glad there weren’t, but I don’t know what else to say. I guess all I can say is that I shouldn’t have jumped to conclusions based on the testimony of one person in a group. Trent’s story was 100% accurate, but it wasn’t complete it seems. We should have gone to your headmaster, like you said. The only thing in our defense is that our principal was entirely useless. But Blaine should have known that going to the Dalton Headmaster would have solved the problem. Why did Trent think that everyone besides him was taking them?”

“After it all went down, I figured it out. Hunter divided us into three groups and had us come in to talk to him – about five or six per group. He talked to us about our classes, how he felt we were performing in the group. We all just assumed that’s what happened in the other two groups. But Hunter picked out the members who he thought were underperforming and grouped them together. The four guys that were doing the steroids were in a group with Trent. He refused. He wasn’t allowed to perform with us because of it. But Hunter had told the other two groups that Trent’s father was upset about his mid-term grades and so he couldn’t perform with us at Sectionals, but to not talk to him about it because he was upset about it. He told us that Trent had already gotten a tutor and he’d be back performing by Regionals, if we made it. We just believed him and said nothing to Trent. He’s such a nice guy to everyone. No one wanted to make him feel worse. He was a fourth-year Warbler.”

“So, only four of the Warblers took them?”

“Yeah. Think about it. If all of us had taken steroids, there wouldn’t have been any Warblers to ask to help with the proposal. Zero tolerance means zero tolerance. Drug use is an automatic expulsion. That’s why there were just 10 of us at the proposal.”

“I’m willing to write an email and you can send it to all of the Warblers who weren’t taking the steroids to apologize for what I did, if that makes a difference to you. All I see is the Blaine-effect at Dalton still though. He and I turned the Warblers in to the Show Choir Board rather than to the headmaster. That action caused the scandal. If Blaine had gone to the headmaster, like he would have known to do, the issue would have been kept in house. The Warblers would have been drug-tested and only those who tested positive would have been expelled. There would have been no scandal because their parents would have managed to keep it under wraps. But the Blaine-effect somehow negates the fact that his actions caused the scandal because Dalton chose to hire him to make sure there are no more scandals.”

“I was angry when I heard that he is the Warblers’ advisor for that very reason.”

“We were all floundering. I know it’s no excuse, but at McKinley if the Glee Club doesn’t place, the club disbands for the year. No Regionals meant that we were done. Coach Sue took over the room when we normally met and she made it so that there were no other rooms available for us to meet in. We met outside one day late in the afternoon in the dark. She literally scheduled the auditorium until 10:00 at night so that we couldn’t even use it to meet and sing, just as a club for fun. When the scandal broke and we were back in the competition, we got our room back. And now I realize how messed up all of that was. I think I’m at the same place with you that you are
with Kurt. What I did to the Warblers really hurt you. What you did to Kurt really hurt him and what I did to Kurt really hurt him. And he’s not done anything to either one of us other than lob some really creative insults at you, but you said you brought that on yourself.”

“Yeah. I did. The best one was probably him saying that I smelled like Craig’s List.”

Sam cracked up. “That’s awesome!”

“Yeah, well, that one stopped me in my tracks that day because I didn’t even know what Craig’s List was. I looked it up after I left.”

Sam laughed at him.

“I know, I know. And you’re right. I deserved it. I never said a single nice or decent thing to him. Look, I forgive you. You didn’t know what would happen because of what you did and said you were clinically depressed and that messes up people’s perceptions and it seems that anyone who comes into contact with the Blaine-effect loses touch with reality. So, I want to see these videos you were talking about.”

“Give me a couple of minutes. Get some headphones while I find it.”

Sebastian got up and grabbed his earbuds out of his backpack that was on the floor in front of the bookcase. He sat back down right next to Sam.

Sam pulled up the first one. “Okay. So, when I first enrolled at McKinley, I didn’t join Glee Club. Finn asked me to and I even went and sang with the guys. The fact that Kurt wasn’t there with them should have told me something, but I was new and I didn’t think anything of it. Anyway, I did finally join in October and the first week I was there, Mr. Schue assigned duets.” Sam explained the entire thing and ended with, “This is what Kurt did when he performed by himself.” He handed his phone over.

Sebastian plugged his earbuds in and watched and listened. He looked up when the video finished. “That’s one hell of a glissando. That was more than two octaves.”

“He has over a three octave range.” Sam scooted closer to Sebastian. “I wasn’t here for this one, but just listen to the first like 30 seconds.” Sam played “Give Up the Funk”.

“That’s him?”

“Yep.” Sam chose a different file.

Sebastian listened all the way through. “Wow. ‘Defying Gravity’? That’s amazing.”

“Here, this was from the year before I came as well.”

Sebastian watched the whole video. “How did he not break his neck in those heels?”

“I have no idea. But he made that outfit and wore it to school all day. From what I’ve heard he wore corsets and skirts and kilts too. He wore whatever he liked. He didn’t give a care what other people said. He wore a kilt to Junior Prom.” Sam took the phone back and started looking through the files. After a few minutes, he stopped and just sat there staring into space.

“Hey, you zoned out.”

“Yeah, because I just realized something.”
“What?”

“Kurt sang a lot of solos in Glee Club the first year and I heard several my first year even though I joined late and he left for like 5 months. And I just looked through the whole file for his senior year. There’s one duet he did with Blaine that they sang to Santana after she got outed. And he had a couple of lines in ‘ABC’, but he wasn’t featured at Regionals or Nationals. I can only find two solos. And one was him singing because all of the seniors were asked to sing a goodbye song, but not all of them prepared something. And the other one makes me sick to listen to.” He explained the whole Chandler debacle and then handed Sebastian the phone again. “So, this is what Blaine sang. Listen to it, and then I’ll switch it to Kurt’s song.”

Sebastian listened to both songs. “So, Blaine texted with me for months and even told me your Regionals plans, but he sang that song to Kurt after a few days of getting cheesy texts from a guy he talked to for a few minutes in a music shop?”

“You got it. And if you notice, when he sang, Kurt left out most of the verses that were self-love type words and just sang the part about being nothing several times. And look what he was wearing.”

He turned the phone toward Sebastian again.

“Blaine dressed in bright colored clothes with these ridiculous bowties. He wore his pants like four inches too short and never wore socks. Kurt completely mellowed out and when I think about it, after I came back, he mostly seemed to wear darker neutral colors.”

“I remember saying something mean to him about it, like he was finally wearing ‘boy clothes’ the day I confronted about half of the New Directions in Lima Bean the afternoon after Blaine had told me about your plans for Regionals.”

“Anyway, the amazing and outlandish Kurt was stuffed inside at Dalton behind the uniform and when he first came back, he let it back out. He showed up his first day back at McKinley in a white bondage jacket and a top hat.”

Sebastian laughed.

“Totally serious. He rocked it. But after Blaine came to McKinley, Kurt became less and less Kurt.”

“Do you have any videos of him singing with the band you said he started?”

“It was called One Three Hill, well the final group of him, Elliott, and Dani. Let me look.” He found one and let Sebastian watch it.

“They were good. Why didn’t Blaine like it?”

“He didn’t like that Kurt was spending so much time with Elliott.”

“Well, he’s completely gorgeous.”

“And gay.” Sam took his phone back. “So, anyway, back to why I originally started this conversation. Please accept his forgiveness and if you need help doing so, get your therapist to help you figure out how. I know you don’t have a previous friendship with him to refer back to as to a baseline, but if you just realize that he is sincere, maybe that will help. I don’t know. At least you should be able to recognize that he is loyal to a fault and has been a good friend to people who were never good friends back to him. I’m pretty sure there aren’t a lot of people who would be a
better friend to you – if you can get over hating yourself for what you did and just work on being friends with him.”

“I get it. And I’d like for the two of us to be friends too. It’s been quite a while since I’ve let anyone close enough to actually make friends. I went to school with the same guys starting in what you call middle school. I haven’t really made the effort to make any new friends since then. I ran around with the same group of guys from age 11 to nearly 18. So, it’s been a really long time. I haven’t tried at all here in the States, not even after coming here. Well, except for Isabelle. And she’s family. I didn’t remember her very well, but she just sort of pushed her way in.”

Sam laughed. “I’ve seen her persuasiveness in action.”

Sebastian looked confused.

“She bought Kurt his favorite Indian lunch, offered him twice his previous salary, and then basically begged and offered him anything else in her power if he’d just go back to Vogue to be her PA.”

Sebastian laughed. “She thinks he can walk on water from her descriptions of his magnificent abilities to keep her organized and grounded.”

“Well, he’s the king of organized, that’s for sure. How else could he have taken extra classes, worked as her PA, run the band, and worked at the diner?”

“That’s true.”

They heard the bedroom door open and Kurt came out into the living room. “You two have become chatty Cathies. You’re still talking?”

“We’ve actually finished,” Sam said. “All that’s left is the hug.”

“The hug?” Sebastian responded.

“Yeah. The hug. You know, you talk through your problems and issues and when you’re done you hug it out.”

“Is this some weird American thing?”

Kurt crossed his arms and scowled at Sebastian teasingly and reminded him, “You’re American, Sebastian.”

“Only half. And not that half that ‘hugs things out’.”

Sam laughed.

Kurt said, “Get used to it. Sam hugs. He’s the first guy who ever willingly touched me. He’s hugged you before and it didn’t kill you.”

“That was a surprise hug. I was hug ambushed. You never know. Maybe the second time will.”

Kurt walked closer to Sam, who grabbed Sebastian and pulled him to standing. “Hug. Come on. You can do it. I have faith in you.”

“Will you shut up already?” Sebastian complained teasingly.

“Not until I get my hug.”
“Seriously?” Sebastian shook his head and rolled his eyes.

Sam nodded. “There are brownies at stake.”

“I don’t get any of the brownies until I hug you? You can’t hold the brownies hostage. They don’t belong to you.” He turned and pulled Kurt into a hug. “There. I hugged the rightful owner of the brownies.”

Kurt was laughing too hard to say much, but he managed to shove Sebastian back just enough that he stepped back to keep his balance and Sam grabbed him and hugged him quickly and let him go before he had a chance to put up a fuss.

“See, not dead.”

“Yet. It might be insidious and take weeks to manifest. I wouldn’t know. I might unknowingly spread it all over everywhere.”

“Now, you’re ridiculous.” Kurt laughed more.

“But you’re laughing and that makes all of it worth it, even hugging him!”

Sam pouted.

Kurt stepped closer and wrapped his arms around Sam and stroked the back of his head. “There, there. I’ll willingly hug you.”

Sam grabbed Kurt and spun him around.

“Put me down, you brute.”

“Brute? Me?” He put his hands over his heart melodramatically. “I’m nothing but a lonely soul offering hugs only to have them rejected. And now you, my best friend in the whole world, you call me a brute? I’m wounded, wounded to the core.”

“When did this turn into a soap opera?” Kurt asked, shaking his head and smiling.

“About the time you came out of the bedroom,” Sebastian said.

“Oh, so this is somehow my fault?”

“Nope, not at all. But that’s definitely when the nonsense started. Maybe we’re just ready to stop being so freaking serious all the time,” Sam said wrapping his arms around Kurt from behind and propping his chin on Kurt’s shoulder.

“I agree,” Sebastian said. “Let’s watch David Tennant travel around in a police call box and eat the food you so kindly made for us.”

“One. But Sam has to let me go so I can turn the oven on and cook the chicken wings.”

“But you’re the only one who will let me hug you,” Sam whined.

“Fine, get over here. I’ll hug you so he can go make the chicken wings. I’m hungry.”

Kurt had been watching the episode over the half-wall between the kitchen and living room. Once
the chicken was done, he grabbed the remote and pressed pause. “Come eat at the table. I didn’t take into consideration that we don’t have a coffee table when I chose this menu. I used to make these for my dad for big game days. But we have a coffee table to put them on in front of the TV. You need both hands to eat these.”

“We’re eating with our hands?”

“Well, you can opt to let me and Sam have all of them.”

“Hands it is.”

They all sat around the table.

“Why do we have wet paper towels on plates?”

“To wipe your fingers to keep from getting the sauce anywhere near your eyes.”

“I’m confused.”

Sam offered an explanation. “These are Kurt Hummel’s famous spicy Buffalo wings with raw vegetables and homemade blue cheese dip. If you get the sauce in your eyes, we’ll have to flush them like mad to get it out. You do not want that to happen. The raw vegetables dipped in the dressing in between chicken wings helps cut the heat a bit and lets you keep eating the ridiculously delicious, way-too-spicy chicken wings.”

“Hmm. Sounds dangerous.”

“Where’s your sense of adventure?” Kurt asked.

“I’m considering whether losing my taste buds is worth this adventure.”

“Definitely,” Sam said. He took his first chicken wing and ate it, cleaning it down to the bones, which he piled on the plate in front of him. He ate some celery and dip and took another wing.

“I’ll try one.”

“If you don’t like them, I’ll make you something else. I never thought about you never having eaten them before. They’re a very popular dish for binge-watching televised sports. And since we’re binge-watching Doctor Who, I thought it would be a fun time to make them since no one here will ever binge-watch sports like my dad and Finn did.”

Sebastian took a bite. “Oh, it’s spicy, but not really in a bad way.” He finished the first wing and took a bite of celery dipped in the dressing. “Those really do work together. I like it.”

“Well, dig in. I made plenty.”

By the end of the third episode, Kurt was sleeping up against Sam.

Sam moved his shoulder just a bit. “Kurt… Hey, why don’t you go shower and Sebastian and I will clean up?”

“M’kay.” Kurt stretched a little and snuggled back in.

Sam laughed. “Kurt…”
“Yeah?”

“Go get ready for bed.”

He opened his eyes and sat up. “Oh, sorry. I didn’t mean to fall asleep on you.”

“It’s fine. Wasn’t the first time, won’t be the last. Go shower. Sebastian and I will clean up. You cooked.”

“Thanks.” This time he managed to make it to standing and walked down to their room.

“He’s really adorable when he’s sleepy,” Sebastian said, smiling.

“He’s adorable all the time if you don’t act like a jackass to him and turn his ice bitch mode on.”

They both headed into the kitchen and started to wash and dry the dishes.

“Has he ever turned it on you?”

“Never. He’d look sad, but he’d just go back to whatever he was doing, which was actually worse because he never even fought back. He just resigned himself to the fact that Blaine got everything that he ever wanted, even if it was something that had been Kurt’s to start with. Kurt never once lashed out at me.”

“I’m seeing a completely new side to him.”

“You’re seeing the real him. He is bitchy, sarcastic, and perfectionistic. But he’s a really amazing friend. Open up. You’ll see. He’d give you the shirt off his back if you needed it. I’d know. He brought me clothes when we lost our house.”

“I’ll work on it. I closed myself off when I came to the States. I bottled a lot of things up. I’m doing better.”

“I know. Otherwise, you would have never let us move in with you.”

Sebastian nodded. “I’ve liked what the two of you made dinner this week when I sampled everything. I’d like us to go in together on the dinner menu and eat together like Kurt suggested. We can still buy separate things for breakfast and lunch. I’m okay with fairly repetitive breakfasts and lunches, so buying in bulk just for me for those meals is fine, but I’d like to eat dinner with you two.”

“We’ll go to Costco sometime tomorrow, even if Kurt has too much work to do to go with us. If there’s something you’d like for dinner, just write down what we’d need to make it. Kurt and I aren’t picky eaters.”

Sebastian nodded. He looked around the kitchen. “That’s it. We’re done.”

Sam went back into living room area and ejected the DVD. He put it back in the case, into the box, and then put the box into the cabinet – keeping Kurt’s stuff organized. “When he came back with these DVDs the day he went to sell off his clothes, I was surprised, but really happy. It was the first thing I’d seen him buy in a long time that wouldn’t have been ‘Blaine approved’.”

“He sold off a bunch of his clothes?”

“Yeah. What you saw us bring here is pretty much everything he owns now. He doesn’t really have more than maybe a box of stuff left in Lima, if that much. And he sold off everything in the
loft back at the end of the summer when he moved into a dorm room at NYADA, before he went back to Lima. It was hard on him. He had scoured flea markets and secondhand stores to find the cool vintage stuff they had at a price he could afford. But he seems to be getting over it.”

“Who knows he’s here?”

“Here as in this apartment with you and me? Just his parents and Isabelle. As far as who knows that he’s here in the City, obviously Isabelle and everyone at Vogue. I don’t know if he’s told Mercedes that he came back to the City or not. But everyone will assume that he’ll be back in January when the semester starts again, except for anyone who might think that he’s just dropped out completely. But he got rid of all of his social media accounts and blocked pretty much everyone from calling him.”

“Alright.”

“So, if you’re big on using social media, just keep any info about the two of us out of your posts, please.”

“I have a Facebook account, but I rarely post anything. I was still pretty messed up when I moved in here and pretty determined that I would be heading back to Paris in two years. I haven’t had people over. I didn’t take the extra class each semester so I could graduate early. I took it because the tuition covers up to 18 hours and I figured why not. I like to learn and I wasn’t going to party or attempt to make friends. I was just trying to fill time and keeping busy. Being bored makes time go slower.”

“So having us here is a big change.”

“It is, but it’s been nice. I think maybe I’m circling back to being myself. I’m not as angry anymore. I think I’m ready to face the future now.”

“So, you’re sure that you’re staying all next school year?”

“I’m 90% sure. 10% of me is still saying no, but I think logic will win out because being able to finish in one more school year versus two sounds really good when I spent two years completing what should have been one in high school. Do you have any ideas about what you want to do?”

“Not really. Coming here was a temporary fix to my problem of being jobless and homeless. I quit my job and gave up my apartment in Lima because I just didn’t want to be there anymore. I don’t really want to live in Kentucky with my parents. I like what I’m doing now just fine. I think I’m just one of those people who doesn’t really have any ambition, but not because I’m lazy or not willing to work hard. I just don’t know of anything that would make going to school for four years worth it to me, like I mentioned earlier. I don’t have any aspirations of being rich. I already sort of did the famous thing. I mean there are still buses driving around the city with me on the side of them. The ads are still running in magazines and on billboards. I’m not even sure what made me decide to do that. That’s not true. I do know. It started with that damn calendar. That’s a story for another time. The only thing I’m actually any good at is art. I’m hoping to figure myself out more by May when the job at Vogue ends.”

“We’re all at the same point in our lives I think – figuring out where to go from here.”

“I think you’re right about us all being in the same place between the past us and the future us.”
The Monday before Thanksgiving was Sam’s first day at the job he had gotten working at a coffee shop down the street from the apartment. His hours were from 6:00-noon, 7 days a week for 6 weeks, and then it would just be on the weekends. He was temporarily replacing someone who had broken her leg and wouldn’t be able to come back to work for 6 more weeks. It was a perfect second job since he didn’t have to commute and getting off at noon on the weekends still gave him plenty of time to have fun.

Tuesday morning, Kurt went to see his therapist in person for the first time. Afterwards, he spent time working out in the stage combat room followed by some much overdue time in the dance studio. It was a good combination that allowed him to work out some of his anger in a productive way after his session and get back into shape. He planned to continue the combination each Tuesday morning.

Thanksgiving morning, Sebastian came out of his room to find Kurt sitting at the dining table waiting for him.

“Come sit down. I made breakfast. It’s in the oven to keep it warm.” Kurt started to get up.

“I can get it. Thank you. You didn’t need to go to so much trouble.” Sebastian used a potholder to pull the tray out and put the food on the two plates that Kurt had already sat out on the counter. He carried them over to the table. “It looks good.” He sat down and started to eat.

“I wanted you to have at least one nice meal today.” Kurt took a bite of his omelette.

“At least I have Isabelle to keep me company now.”

“That’s true. She’s one of the nicest people I know.”

“She really is.” Sebastian focused on eating. He hadn’t planned on eating anything. He finished quickly. “I hate to run out on you.”

“It’s fine. I knew you probably weren’t going to eat anything. I’ll put the plates in the dishwasher. You can go ahead out and go to the airport. I’ll see you tomorrow since I’m sure we’ll be asleep by the time you get back.”

Sebastian stood and so did Kurt. Kurt stepped forward and offered Sebastian a hug, which he accepted.

“It took me a while to get used to the hugs. If they bother you, we’ll stop. We were just teasing you Saturday.”

“I’ll be fine. I’ve just kept my distance from people for so long that it will take time. Even if I tease that you’re both giving me cooties or whatever, I don’t mean it. It’s just been a long time since I’ve let my walls down enough to …”

“I get it. I kept my walls up for 8 years, only to then let the wrong person close to me. You better get going.”
“Yeah. Thanks again for breakfast.” He grabbed his coat out of his closet and put it on.

“You’re welcome.”

Kurt didn’t go back to sleep. He pulled his yoga mat out and went through his workout. Once he finished, he put it back and brought his French book out to the dining room. He left it on the table and got started in the kitchen.

He made a pumpkin pie and put it in the oven. He read while it baked. He took it out and sat it out to cool for a while before he refrigerated it. While it was cooling, he prepped the turkey breast he had bought so it would be ready to put in the oven. He also mixed the cornbread batter. He went back to his reading once the pie was cool enough to put in the refrigerator with the other items.

He put his schoolwork away at 10:00 and got ready to go. Once he was dressed, put the turkey in the oven to bake. He grabbed his coat, a scarf, a hat, and his gloves. He bundled up and headed out to meet Sam to go to the Macy’s Parade.

Sam came out of the coffee shop carrying a cup of coffee for Kurt. “Did you start cooking without me?”

They headed toward the parade route while they talked.

“Just the pie. The turkey is in the oven right now. I didn’t make anything else yet.”

“Good because I thought we were making everything together.”

“Pumpkin pie tastes best once it’s had time to chill completely, so I went ahead and did that. I prepped the cornbread batter too. You’ve had three really long days. I wanted to be able to eat not too long after we get back.”

“Yeah, I’ve not to be at work so early before, but my bank account will be happy with me. I figured if I save all of the money I make at the coffee shop, I can add another nearly $3000 to my savings over the next 6 months.”

“That will really help.”

“Yeah, the extra hours will just be for the next 6 weeks. Then I’ll be at Vogue from 9-6. And I won’t have to get up at 5:15, except on the weekends. But, still, the barista job is awesome because I don’t have to commute. And my boss is nice. I told her when I took the job last week that I needed off at 10:30 today and she was nice about it.”

Three hours later, they were back and in the kitchen cooking together.

“Peeled potatoes for you, sir,” Sam said, using his English butler voice.

“Why thank you, Evans. Cut them in quarters and dump them in the boiling water, if you please. I love this fancy oven. It has a built-in timer and an auto-warm feature, so I didn’t have to be afraid I might burn the apartment down. It’s almost done though.”

Kurt put a bag of long green beans on to cook with some ham chunks. When the oven timer went off, he pulled the turkey out, but left the roaster lid on to keep the heat in. He put the pan of
cornbread in the oven. By the time the cornbread was done, everything else was ready as well. Kurt pulled down some plates. They served themselves and took their plates to the table to eat.

“We are good cooks, if I do say so myself,” Kurt said.

“Mmm. I agree. So good.”

“So, you know the Hummel tradition.”

“I think it’s a lot of people’s tradition, but I’m thankful that you’re my best friend again. I really missed you.”

“I’m thankful that you and Mercedes helped me see the error of my ways. And I’m glad to have my best friend back too. Have you talked to her since we moved in?”

“No. It’s hard. I still love her, but she has this whole life that I don’t fit into. I don’t want to travel to 30 cities in two months going from show to show, living on a tour bus. She has big dreams and they’re going to come true for her. But I can’t be the one to share that with her because I would just be a killjoy eventually. Plus, it would be so unfulfilling for me. Unless I could be in her band and do something useful with my time, I would go stir crazy. But we’re like magnets when we’re near each other. I just can’t let myself break my own heart again and get involved with her when our dreams just don’t match.”

“I felt like that’s how it was for Finn and Rachel. She really did love him and I know he loved her, but he just couldn’t be her accessory, which is how he felt when he came to stay with us. I miss him. He and I had finally started to get things right as brothers.”

“He had changed a lot that last year. I think he had started to figure himself out.”

“I knew he didn’t want to live in New York. I’m glad that he had figured out what he wanted to do and that he started doing it and that he was finally happy for himself. I still wish he were here though.”

“Yeah. Me too.”

Kurt wiped his eyes. “I never really thought about it until just now. I was a condescending ass to him, telling him that he was better than just being the one to carry Rachel’s purse. I was all high and mighty with my fake confidence about making it big. I know that I needed that bravado. I had to keep hold of that façade. Letting people see that I was afraid wasn’t an option, but really he really did seem to figure out what he wanted to do. I’m still lost and I have three semesters left.” He sighed in aggravation with himself. He changed the subject. “Are you ready for our Star Trek marathon?”

“As soon as we clean up. I can’t believe you managed to snag the first season of Deep Space 9 DVD set at the library.”

“I put it on hold. It wasn’t happenstance. I planned this.”

“We will boldly go…”

“To eat pie in the living room,” Kurt finished.

Sam laughed. “Perfect.” He picked up their plates and cleaned the table off while Kurt cut two slices of pie and plated them.
"That was totally different from all of _The Next Generation_ episodes I’ve seen. It wasn’t really what I was expecting, but I like it so far."

"It is really different, but I like it a lot. When’s Sebastian supposed to get back?"

"I figured we wouldn’t see him until tomorrow morning. Their flight isn’t for another couple of hours. 10:15 departure, I think he said. So, he won’t get back for quite a while."

"So, tomorrow’s plan?"

"After you get off work, shopping of course."

"Of course. Mostly for me, I know. I can’t get away with having so few clothes to wear to work. No one has said anything, but I’m having to wash clothes every other day. Anything to look forward to doing tomorrow?"

"Shopping."

Sam tickled him. “You already said shopping. What else?”

“You get to be with me,” Kurt posed in a ridiculous fashion magazine way.

“Well, that’s true. That will make the shopping a lot less horrible. Especially since you’re going to go out bargain hunting and you’ll have whatever you’ve found waiting for me to try it on. I really like having a personal shopper.”

Kurt stuck his tongue out.

Sam rolled his eyes.

“We’re going to come back and eat Thanksgiving leftovers with Sebastian. Is that more fun?”

“Probably. Add in another few episodes of _Dr. Who_ and it will be even better.”

“Fine. Shopping, leftovers, and _Dr. Who_."

“Sounds fun.”

“If it’s nice out we could go for a walk in Central Park on our way back.”

“Okay.” Sam switched to being serious. “How are you feeling about living here?”

“I think it’s going to be fine. Sebastian seems to be relaxing a bit. He seems to feel extraordinarily guilty for how he acted, but he’s less tense than he was a week and a half ago. Maybe part of it is just getting used to having other people in his apartment? I’ve been trying to be very low key and this week I went to NYADA in the mornings to hopefully be ready for dance next semester. I’m out of shape. It’s been nice seeing a few of the guys I was in stage combat with. We sparred a little on Tuesday after my therapy session.”

“Do you feel like the therapist is helping?”

“I do. The one I went to over the summer wasn’t a good fit and I see that now. But this one is helpful.”
“That’s good.”

Kurt had a flash of panic in his eyes and pulled his phone out. He opened the lists that Mercedes and Sam had made of the things Blaine had told them. “I just thought about something. I talked to my dad last night after you went to sleep. They signed all the paperwork the beginning of week. The new owners take possession of the house on Monday, which is December 1st.” Kurt started scanning through the document he opened. “Oh, God.”

“What? I thought them being able to sell the house quickly would be good news, but you don’t sound like it’s good news. I’m confused.”

“Oh, them selling the house so quickly is good news. Carole had already downsized the contents of the house. They were ready. The furniture from my room and the family room are already in storage. They’re hiring a company to move everything else there this weekend. They’re moving into a furnished one-bedroom place with month-to-month leases. It’s kind of like a motel. But thinking about how Monday is December 1st is what made me think about something.”

He handed the phone to Sam and pointed to what he had just read. Sam read it and hand it back to him. Kurt put the phone down next to him on the couch.

“I’ve been operating on the idea that he’d be back at the beginning of January. He may be back next week. Mercedes’ list says, ‘He’s staying through Sectionals in Ohio. Has a place in New York next month.’ But it was the end of October when she wrote that, but now that I think about it, Sectionals are usually at the end of November. I’m sure that ‘next month’ must have meant December.”

“I hadn’t thought about it, but after you left, he may have had to find a different place because wherever he had found – he made it pretty clear that you’d have to work in order to afford the place. So, unless his parents just drastically changed their minds on how much they’re willing to give him each month, he’ll need to find someplace else.”

“I suppose. But if he was so certain about already having a place lined up, he would have already put a deposit down and getting out of a lease isn’t easy. Trust me, I tried to move out of the loft at the end of May, but we had three months left on the lease and the landlord would not allow me to sublease it and take my name off the lease. It would be more likely that his parents will tell him to find a roommate the first month he’s here to cover half the costs. He didn’t need them to sign the lease, so they have no legal obligation to pay the rent. He didn’t tell his parents about Dave or our break-up in May. He may have just found someone else already and not even told his parents that I left him.” Kurt flopped back. “I’m not ready.”

“We’ll go to Vogue together like usual. Maybe he will leave you alone.”

“Maybe, but that won’t stop the feeling of being watched.”

“I know. Do you want to put in the next disc? I’ll go put the pizza in the oven.”

“Sure. I need another dose of space intrigue to stop myself from thinking about how ironic it is that I’d rather run into Dave than Blaine.”

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Kurt and Sam came back into the apartment laughing. Kurt saw Sebastian in the kitchen getting ready to make himself something to eat for dinner.
“Don’t do that.”

“Don’t do what?”

“Make anything to eat. We’re having leftovers for dinner. Eat with us?”

“Sure.”

Kurt and Sam took the bags they were carrying to their bedroom, hung their coats up, and went into the kitchen. They washed up and Sam started pulling stuff out of the refrigerator.

After the three of them finished eating, they spent Friday evening goofing around. They assembled the mini pre-lit Christmas tree that Kurt had bought when he had been out shopping that morning before Sam got off. They decorated it with the tiny music themed ornaments he had bought. Sebastian moved the TV to the right and they put the tree on the TV cabinet. Sam got down and fiddled until he got it plugged in behind the cabinet and Kurt hit the switch to turn it on.

“Well, what do you think?” Kurt asked.

“It’s fun and festive. Works for me,” Sam said.

“I like it.”

Kurt pulled out a few card games that he still had and they sat around listening to some Christmas music and played games.

“If you like Star Trek, you can join us on part two of our Deep Space 9 marathon tomorrow.”

“Sure, but I’ve not seen it before.”

“I have to say farewell to the festivities soon anyway because I need to get more schoolwork done, but the DVDs are in the cabinet. You could watch what we watched yesterday and get caught up.”

“Sure.”

“We were going to watch more Doctor Who this evening, but then I saw the tiny tree and changed my mind. I’m not even religious, but it’s one of the really clear memories I have with my mom. When I saw it, my mind just flashed back to when she was still here. She loved Christmas and the decorating and the baking. We’d put the tree up and dance around to Christmas music. Then the week before Christmas we’d spend a ton of time baking. We didn’t have a lot of money back then and she’d buy baking supplies like chocolate chips and chopped nuts throughout the year and freeze them whenever she saw them on sale. Just a bag here and a bag there. And then we’d bake and bake and give everyone homemade treats for Christmas. All the guys that worked at my dad’s shop, my teacher, family friends. All of that went away when she died. I decided I want to bring the tradition back. The holidays are a tough time for a lot of people, so despite the fact that I don’t believe in anything the Christmas holiday represents religiously, I’m going to add cheer to the season this year like my mom always did.”

“I’m in. Well, if I’m invited to participate, I’d love to join you,” Sebastian said.

“Of course you’re invited. If you have any traditions that you’re fond of, just let us know.”

Sam said, “I gotta hit the hay. 5:15 still isn’t coming naturally as a time to wake up.”
Kurt and Sam went to their bedroom. Kurt grabbed his laptop, his French book, and closed the door behind him. He sat down at the dining table with his back to the TV and put earbuds in so he could work on his paper without being distracted by the TV or bothering Sam with his typing.

Sunday evening, Kurt got up off the couch and stretched. “Maybe we can continue with the second season at some point. I really like this a lot. It’s completely different from the other parts of Star Trek.”

“I liked it too. I’ve never watched Star Trek, so I don’t really have any frame of reference, but I’d watch more of this series.”

“Well, you know I’m in.”

Kurt rolled his eyes. “Of course. I’m not sure we’ve met a sci fi series that you didn’t like.”

“Probably not, but I do have an idea that might be perfect for all of us, but I’ll have to see if I can find it to borrow or whether I’ll have to buy it.”

“Well, I’ve had fun, but I have to sleep. The two courses I added have been kicking my butt. I haven’t written so many papers since I went to Dalton.”

“Performing arts degrees turn your brain to mush,” Sebastian teased.

“I’m sure there’s a joke in there somewhere about English majors, but I’m too tired to think one up.”

Monday morning, Kurt spent an hour in the dance studio stretching and working on relearning the moves he had worked so hard to perfect over the summer. Once he finished he headed into the locker room to shower and redress, even though he was just heading to the stage combat practice room and would end up showering again an hour later.

On his way out, he pulled the door open and Adam almost fell into the room. He startled, but it took a second for him to look toward Kurt because he had been talking to someone on his phone. He slipped in his pocket and refocused.

“Kurt.” He gave Kurt the warm smiled Kurt always associated with him.

“Adam.” Kurt’s voice was full of surprise and concern. “Sorry about that. I didn’t mean to make you stumble.” He held the door open and Adam stepped inside.

“My fault for trying to walk and talk on the phone at the same time.”

“I was going to head to the stage combat area, but would you have time to grab some coffee?”

“Let me shower and change and I’m all yours.”

“I’ll wait out on the front steps.”

“I’ll be right out.”

Kurt made his way through the hallways and headed outside. He sat on the cold concrete steps. Sitting outside with wet hair wasn’t the best idea, but he wrapped his scarf around his neck and
over the top of his head somewhat and stayed put. He sat and tried to relax. He didn’t want to give Adam the impression that it was a date, but he didn’t want to be cold or aloof. He started humming to himself and closed his eyes to calm his nerves. Kurt felt Adam’s presence after he finished the song.

“That was lovely, as always. Coffee, then?”

“Yes.”

Kurt got up and they walked a couple of blocks to a small coffee shop. They ordered.

“Why don’t you find us a spot and I’ll wait for our drinks,” Kurt offered.

“Sure.” Adam walked away in search of an empty table.

A few minutes later, Kurt placed Adam’s tea in front of him and sat down across from him. Kurt took gloves off and put them in his coat and laid it over the chair next to him as he sat down. Kurt turned and reached for his cup, but before he managed to pick it up, Adam grabbed his left hand.

“Oh, my God. You’ve done it! Kurt, that’s amazing!”

Kurt started to cry, but held the tears back. “I did, but only because Mercedes and Sam saved me.”

“I’m sorry, love. I don’t remember a Mercedes or a Sam. Rachel and Santana, yes.”

“Mercedes was in LA, well, still is. Sam was in Ohio in high school still.”

“Well, I’d love to thank them in some way. This is bloody fantastic. I know you don’t believe in God, and I’m not sure that I do, but I prayed that you’d escape somehow.”

“Thank you. I’m so sorry about everything. I stayed away like you wanted, but it was so hard.”

“Stayed away? I didn’t want you to stay away from me. What are you referring to?”

“Rachel told me that she saw you that next Monday and that you had told her to ask me not to come back to the Apples, so I didn’t.”

“She what? That wench. Sorry, love. I shouldn’t call people names. But how dare she!”

Kurt looked confused.

Adam didn’t say anything right away, but was clearly focusing to remember something. “The only thing I recall saying to her was that I was looking forward to seeing you at rehearsal that next day or something similar. I certainly didn’t kick you out or want you to quit.”

“Oh.”

“When you didn’t come that week or the next, I assumed that you had quit. I tried texting you when you didn’t come the second time, but you had blocked me.”

“I didn’t. I swear.”

“I believe you, love. When I asked around after I was back in town and had gotten settled in, the rumor mill said that you were back in Ohio. But I didn’t get any details.”

“No one knows any details. I don’t have any friends here.” Kurt picked his coffee cup up with his
right hand, unwilling to break their connection. “I’m a mess, Adam. You are the sweetest, kindest person. Honestly, I think you’re the only person who hasn’t really hurt me. But I’m a wreck. I’m seeing a therapist.”

“Is it helpful?”

“It is. For the first time in a really long time I’m trying to figure out who I am. Not who I am in relation to someone else or an occupation. I’ve been Rachel’s best gay, Blaine’s boyfriend, and the various other roles I’ve played over the last several years. I made a huge mistake coming to New York and moving in with Rachel. For years I had dreamed of coming to New York and being able to be myself. To be free. To live life on my terms. And instead, I brought my past with me. It seems like such a long time ago now, but the period when we actually dated was so amazing that it just didn’t seem real. I just felt like you couldn’t be real. I couldn’t let you be real.”

“What do you mean?”

“You were so nice. You were wonderful. You did things for me just because you wanted to.”

He squeezed Kurt’s hand. “I’m missing something.”

“No one had ever been like that with me. No one. I think my mother probably was. But I was so young when she died that my memories of her can’t be trusted to be real. I had so many daydreams and fantasies about how things would have been if she hadn’t died that at this point, it’s impossible to separate out real memories from things I conjured up in my mind after she died or stories my dad told me. Anyway, no one in my working memory was ever kind to me like you were. It was amazing and disconcerting.”

“Disconcerting?”

“It made me feel like if I let myself fall for you that everything would crash and burn when you eventually found someone better and I would end up so much more hurt than I had with Blaine. I was never 100% myself with him like you wanted me to be with you. You wanted all of me. I was too afraid to give it, afraid that once I did, you’d leave and I’d be left with no way to put myself back together. Everyone else picked at my flaws, my imperfections, just my everything. You were so wonderful and I just couldn’t accept it. I knew you’d eventually see all those things the way everyone else did and I wouldn’t be good enough for you either. I’m sorry.”

“I knew, love. I knew. The day we stood in the dance room before we went to the movies, you told me that you wanted to be over him. I knew you were being honest. You weren’t using me as a rebound. You were in desperate need of love. Not the bs that you had with your ex and your so-called friends. I knew that he would do everything in his power to get you back when you went back to see your dad. It had only been a month since you had seen him at the wedding. I know his type. I knew what he was going to do. I’ve felt guilty for not just following you to Ohio, as a reminder that there were people who loved you for yourself. I knew you weren’t in love with me. You were too hurt and he still had a hold over you. But when you came back and told me that you were engaged, I just … my heart broke for both of us.”

“We’d only been barely casually dating for a couple of months. Kisses on the cheek and hugs barely count at dating, but you were a good friend to me. When I stood there and told you – in my mind I was begging for you to just whisk me away and hide me. To take me someplace so far away that no one could find me. But we both had school and … ” Kurt wiped the tears from his face.

Adam wiped his own tears. “What a mess.”
“He’s coming back to New York. He’s starting at NYU next semester. I’m terrified. I lasted six months the first time, five the second, and it’s only been a month this time. And those other times, we weren’t in the same city. Well, the second time we were for about six weeks.”

“So you broke it off with him and went back to him a second time?”

“I called it off last May. He went back to Ohio. I stayed. I went back to Ohio mid-September. We got back together the last week in October and then got married four days later.”

“Married?”

Kurt explained the situation. “I have to stay away from him. He’s like a siren calling me to my doom. I know that sounds melodramatic, but it’s helping me remember to not let him get near me.”

“Whatever works, love.” Adam squeezed his hand. “Despite how you feel or what you’ve been conditioned to believe, you absolutely deserve someone to treat you like the amazing person that you are. And lest you think that I’m some deluded sap who thinks that amazing and perfect are the same thing, I don’t. But I don’t think that you see yourself clearly. Anyone who has been torn down repeatedly will begin to internalize those words and accept them. I think it’s great that you are getting help. Hopefully your therapist will help you readjust your view of yourself.”

“I’m not there yet. I can’t offer anyone anything. I’m barely able to hold onto to what scraps of myself I’ve been able to stitch together the last month. I have 12 hours of academic courses and I’m working half-time, plus more sometimes, at Vogue again.”

“I’m not going to pressure you into a relationship. I didn’t the first time. I would never do that to anyone. But I would still very much like to be your friend.”

“Really? After all this time and what I did to you?”

“The day you told me, I knew that you weren’t happy and that you had made a decision that wasn’t what you had truly wanted. I could see it in your eyes. That’s why I said my heart broke for both of us. I knew you didn’t want to hurt me. I had never see you be anything but kind, even to people who didn’t deserve it. Sassy and a bit bitchy to people who bullied you, like Rachel’s sycophants, yes. But actually mean or hurtful to someone, no, never. You were hurting yourself that day. A few days later, I got an email with a video of the engagement.”

“Oh, God. There’s a video?”

“I’m sorry, love. I didn’t know that you didn’t know about it. But I didn’t watch it at first, and then I finally did after you didn’t come the second week. I understood then. More than I had before. It looked like every person you ever knew in Ohio was there.”

“Pretty much, and then some.”

“That’s when all I could think to do was to pray. I had two opportunities available to me at that point. One back in London and one here. I chose to leave. Maybe if I had stayed, I could have done something.”

“Don’t think that way. When he came that summer, Sam, Artie, and eventually Mercedes came as well. And the only other person I had made friends with after the engagement didn’t last long. So, unless I had risked angering him over and over again, I wouldn’t have spent any time with you anyway. And on top of that, I worked a ridiculous amount. Please don’t feel like you should have done something different.”
“It’s hard not to. Really hard.”

“All I can offer now is friendship right now. And I may not even be any good at that. I have to keep working half-time, plus whatever evenings I get scheduled, and after botching everything this fall, Madame Tibideaux is allowing me to do my internship to next semester. So, I have a tough semester coming up because I’m taking the academic classes that are typically taken with the internship right now, so next semester I’ll have voice, dance, and performance classes to attend and prepare for on top of the internship.”

“You will be swamped.”

“I know.”

“You mentioned living with Rachel as being one of your biggest mistakes. If you’re not living with her, where are you living?”

“Sam’s with me and we’re living with someone we knew back in Ohio, but he didn’t go to school with us. We weren’t close back in Ohio. He goes to Columbia and he has a 2-bedroom place. Sam and I are sharing the other bedroom. Sam’s still in love with Mercedes, but like I said, she’s in LA and out on tour sometimes. He wants the wife, the kids, the house with picket fence, and the dog. She wants to perform and she’s living her dream.”

“That’s tough.”

“It is. He’s the reason I’m free. He hates living in the City, but he came back with me to be here for me.” Kurt refocused. “So, Sam and I are living not far from Central Park on the Upper West Side with Sebastian – at least until the end of the spring semester. He’s actually Isabelle’s second cousin or however that works.”

Adam laughed.

“It’s true. Isabelle is Sebastian’s father’s cousin.”

“Small world.”

“It can be. I just found out a few weeks ago. I met him the fall before I moved here – so a year before I met her. He was a year behind me in school, but he’s my age. Anyway, it’s a really nice place – washer and dryer in the unit, big closets, and security.”

“I like the security part the most.”

“Yeah. There’s no way to keep him off the NYADA campus or the public areas, like sidewalks. I hate the idea of needing protection. But I just can’t deal with being around him. I know I’m not strong enough yet. I know so much more than I knew before. In most ways, I’m much more prepared, but I’m just not ready to deal with him.”

“Come back to the Apples.”

Kurt tilted his head and looked confused.

“Please. Think about it. We rehearse in 15 minutes. Just come with me for today and consider it.”

“So, you rehearse on Mondays at 11:00 in the morning?”

“For now we do. It was when the auditorium was available this semester.”
“It’s too late to join. There are only two weeks before finals.”

“Just come sing along for two weeks. You need some silliness and joy. Come be silly with us and sing.”

Kurt smiled. “You win. I’ll at least watch.”

“Let’s go then.”

They both stood and put their coats and gloves back on. They grabbed their empty cups and tossed them. Once they were outside, Adam reached for Kurt’s hand.

“I’m so glad you’re back. I’d like to meet Sam and Sebastian.”

“Well, we are continuing our *Dr. Who* marathon Saturday evening.”

“Which doctor?”

“Tenth. As if that really matters to you.”

“It doesn’t – just curious. Count me in.”

When they got to the auditorium, Adam said, “Wait here for three minutes, and then come in.”

“Okay…”

Adam opened the door and went inside. He walked up onto the stage and everyone gathered around him.

“Change of plans. We’re doing our epic Heartbreak Triage Trio mash-up.”

Everyone looked confused.

“Some of you will not understand at all and I don’t have time to explain, but for those of you who do… Kurt’s back. Rachel lied and told him I didn’t want him in the Apples. He’s free from Blaine.”

“Finally!”

“We got it. You want him to rejoin. All of us who know him want him back. Let’s do this.”

They moved into position and were ready about the time that Kurt opened the door and came in. He took a seat in the audience and the musicians started to play. Adam sat down next to him and took his hand. The group stood in a pyramid formation, and the front third of the group began to sing. Everyone danced along.

*I know you’re never gonna wake up*  
*I gotta give up*  
*But it’s you*  
*I know I shouldn’t ever call back*  
*Or let you come back*  
*But it’s you*  

*Every time you touch me*
And say you love me
I get a little bit breathless
I shouldn't want it
But it's you

Head in the clouds
Got no weight on my shoulders
I should be wiser
And realize that I've got
One less problem without ya

I got one less problem without ya
I got one less problem without ya
I got one less, one less problem
One less problem without ya

The group rotated clockwise and those in the front began to sing.

Oooo ooo ooo ooo ooo
You called me up again tonight
But oooo ooo ooo ooo ooo
This time I’m telling you I’m telling you

We are never ever ever getting back together
We are never ever ever getting back together
You go talk to your friends, talk to my friends, talk to me
But we are never ever ever getting back together

Oooo ooo ooo ooo ooo
Oooo ooo ooo ooo ooo
I used to think that we were forever ever
And I used to say never say never

So he calls me up and he’s like
I still love you and I’m like
I mean I’m just like this is exhausting ok
We’re never getting back together

The group rotated one last time and the front third began to sing.

I will survive
Oh as long as I know how to love I know I’ll stay alive
I’ve got all my life to live
I’ve got all my love to give and I’ll survive

I will survive
It took all the strength I had not to fall apart
Kept trying ‘hard to mend the pieces of my broken heart
And I spent oh so many nights

Just feeling sorry for myself. I used to cry
But now I hold my head up high

And you see me somebody new
I'm not that chained up little person still in love with you
And so you feel like droppin' in
And just expect me to be free
Now I'm savin' all my lovin' for someone who's lovin' me

The choruses from all three songs mixed together from the whole group in a massive mash-up and ended together with:

*I will survive.*
*Never getting back together.*
*One less problem without you.*

Kurt had a few tears that he hadn’t managed to hold back slipping down his cheek. He wiped them away. Adam squeezed his hand, stood up, and went up on the stage.

“So, what do you say, Kurt? Will you rejoin us?”

The Apples that knew him moved up to the front by Adam and put their hands together like they were praying.

Callie said, “Don’t make me beg any more pitifully. Come on. You know you want to.”

Kurt got up and walked up onto the stage. He was quickly surrounded by the Apples who knew him.

Callie practically squealed. “Does that mean yes?”

Kurt smiled and wiped his eyes again. “Yes, yes. I’ll sing with you IF you rehearse at a time I can make it next semester. I’ll come back next week and watch. I have to pick my schedule up from Madame Tibideaux today still. I have no idea when or if I have any open time.”

There was whooping and general merriment and silliness on the stage. He got quite a few hugs and “welcome back”s from the group.

“Sing for us,” Callie pleaded. “It’s been ages since we’ve heard you sing and some of the newbies have never heard you sing.”

“Something that fits the mood or something in particular?”

“Sing whatever song you’ve listened to the most in the last week.”

Kurt pulled his phone out. “Wow. It’s an oldie. I don’t know if anyone would even know it to be able to play it. And I’m sure the karaoke version is awful. Let me think.” He walked over to the Mark, the pianist, and spoke to him for a minute.

“Okay. This isn’t what I’ve been listening to several times a day, but that song is from the late 90s, but sounds like it’s from the late 70s or early 80s. If anyone can guess, I’ll buy them coffee.”

They all laughed and stood there really thinking. No one said anything after a minute or so.

“Cher – ‘Strong Enough’.” He played the song on his phone.

“Great song, but you’re right, I would have never guessed.”

Kurt nodded to Mark. He started to play. “I’ve listened to this one a few times as well lately and
it’s a good song to start again with.” Kurt started to sing along.

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Buildings with a hundred floors
Swinging ‘round revolving doors
Maybe I don’t know where they’ll take me
But gotta keep moving on, moving on
Fly away, breakaway
---

I gotta take a risk, take a chance, make a change
And breakaway

“That was great, Kurt,” Callie moved over to hug him. “I’m glad you’re back. You’re actually living in the City again, then, right?”

“Yes. I’ll be back in classes next semester. I’m taking a heavy load of academic classes now. Not something I’d recommend. One or two online classes is okay, but adding more is tough. But I’m back in town. It was really great to see all of you, but I have an appointment at 11:30 with Madame Tibideaux.”

“Get moving,” Callie said. “We all know her opinion on tardiness.”

Kurt walked to edge of the stage and down the stairs. Adam followed him down the aisle and out the door.

“I need your address to come over Saturday. If you give me your phone, I’ll put my new number in.”

“Sure.” Kurt handed his phone to Adam.

“What time Saturday?”

“I’ll text you details, but probably around 6:00.”

Adam gave Kurt's phone back. “Great. Can I give you a hug?”

Kurt nodded and stepped into his arms. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, love. I’ll see you Saturday.”

Kurt headed off quickly toward Madame Tibideaux’s office.

Kurt had only been sitting for a few minutes when his name was called. He knocked twice before entering.

“Come in, Mr. Hummel.”

Kurt closed the door behind him and sat down and waited to be spoken to. She handed him a piece of paper.

“Your schedule for next semester.”

“Thank you, Madame Tibideaux.” He looked it over briefly.
She nodded. She looked up at him over her glasses. “You look well. Freedom suits you. You’re back with Isabelle. She’s quite pleased. You’ve secured housing. You’ve attended the counseling I suggested?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Good. good.”

“I also just rejoined the Apples.”

“Very good.” She looked back down at something on her desk.

He looked at his schedule. “When will the summer class schedule be available? I’m considering taking a couple of classes in the summer so that I will hopefully have time to audition for the fall play and spring musical next year since I won’t have been able to be in either one this year like I had hoped.”

“I should have a good idea of what will be offered when classes resume in January. I will email you a list of the most likely courses as soon as I have a list.”

“Thank you.” Kurt stared at the front of the dean’s desk.

She nodded. “There’s something on your mind, young man. Spit it out.”

“I was wondering why my initial application was rejected.”

She took a deep breath and let it out. “I wondered how long it would take for you to ask me that.” She paused and took her glasses off, folded them, and laid them on her desk. She leaned forward a bit, leaning on her desktop with her forearms. She interlaced her fingers. “Your original application was incomplete.”

Kurt looked confused. “I quadruple-checked everything. I sent in everything the school requested.”

“I am aware. During the second portion of the process, along with the live audition, we ask for two in-depth questionnaires to be filled out, if possible. The mandatory one was to be from a school vocal or drama director and the second one was optional. Applicants usually choose teachers such as private vocal coaches or dance instructors for that one. The questionnaires are due before midnight on the Sunday after the live auditions end. Admission is based on the strength of the two portions – the live audition and the in-depth questionnaires.”

“I remember. I asked Mr. Schuester to complete the questionnaire. So, you’re saying that he didn’t send it in?”

“He did not.”

“And Rachel’s?”

“I received hers. Both from Mr. Schuester and the other person she chose.”

“You were very complimentary of my performance and Rachel choked.”

“This is true. Mr. Schuester assured me that Miss Berry had never let the group down before. He sent in video clips of Rachel’s leads in other competitions and then I saw her perform in person at Nationals, where you had a two bar harmony part in a line you sang with Mr. Anderson. You weren’t even chosen to sing as one of Miss Berry’s back up singers during her solo. Mr. Anderson
and two others were. In the video clips Mr. Schuester provided, I diligently looked to find any
evidence of your competition performances after watching them first to assess Miss Berry’s skills.
You were nowhere to be seen in one of them. In the others, you were in the background and your
voice was unheard.”

“I see. He obviously didn’t send clips from our fall Sectionals performance where Rachel did not
sing at all and I sang lead with another girl in our group. And the one when I was nowhere to be
seen in New Directions was when I was at Dalton and had a split lead with Blaine on one of our
songs.”

“I see.”

“What did you admit me when my application was never completed?”

“Oh, but it was. Just in an unusual way. Isabelle filled out the required form that was missing.”

“She knows nothing about my musical skill.”

“Ah, but she knows so much about your work ethic and she knew enough about you to help me
piece together what I figured out about your high school days.”

“You rejected my second application as well.”

“Couldn’t for the life of me figure out why you turned in what you did until I really thought about
it. You put it all out on the line the first time. Broadway, bold and loud, and take me for what I am.
Gold pants, high kicks, and hitting a high G. I praised you, and then rejected you. So, you came
back with the opposite. Calm, quiet, pop fluff with no emotion. After you came in to see me, I
realized that you didn’t know why you had been rejected, I decided to give you a shot at the
Winter Showcase. You were magnificent.”

Kurt blushed. “Thank you.”

“You are amazingly talented, dedicated, and humble. I am pleased that you are here and that you
are staying. I know that being here has not been what you had hoped. Your past coming with you
was not a benefit to you. I will leave it at that. I will say that the past will not be returning. Neither
Miss Berry nor Mr. Anderson will be readmitted to the school.”

Kurt looked visibly relieved.

“This is a private school. If you should find anyone harassing you in any way on school property,
feel free to contact security. Any non-student offender will be escorted off the property and asked
not to return. If it is a current student, the student will be dealt with by school faculty.”

“Thank you, Madame Tibideaux.”

She nodded. “If you have no further questions, you’re free to leave.”

Kurt stood and left.

Tuesday morning, Kurt sat waiting in the reception area until Mr. Salazar opened his door and
called Kurt’s name. He crossed the room and took a deep breath. Kurt followed him in and took a
seat in the chair facing Mr. Salazar’s desk.
“Good morning, Kurt.”

“Good morning.”

“I know we’ve only met in person a couple of times, but I’ve never seen that smile. It’s a nice look on you, by the way.”

Kurt laughed. “I suppose it is. I was just thinking about something that happened nearly two years ago.” He had been thinking about the first song he had seen the Apples perform.

“I see. Is it something you want to talk about?”

“Not particularly. It’s just nice to remember something pleasant once in a while.”

“That’s true.”

“I’m actually feeling pretty selfish.”

“In what way?”

“I ran into Adam and I rejoined the Apples. Callie begged me. Adam clearly wants me to be there. Rachel lied to me, which actually doesn’t surprise me. Adam was as sweet as always. I was up front with him and told him that I have very little to give in any type of relationship right now. He accepted my answer, just like he did the first time around.”

“Do you think he’s still interested in you romantically?”

“I don’t know.”

“What about you?”

“I totally could let myself be. Meaning that he’s awesome and as good looking as ever. But he could be here for just this school year and then go back to England again. Sebastian will go back to France in a year and half. Sam may leave at the end of May. I feel like I’m opening myself up in ways that are really hard for me, but the people I’m closest to are all just going to be gone and out of my life so soon that by the time I work through my issues and I’ve recovered, they’ll all be gone. Is it worth it to put so much effort into interpersonal connections, which you say are so important for me to be able to withstand the onslaught of falling back into a relationship like I had before?”

“I think so.”

“But why? I’m just going to end up loving Sam even more than I already do, and it killed part of me the last time he wasn’t a part of my life. Adam is different of course because I could fall in love with him so easily. Sebastian is a wild card, but he’s changed so much. He’s gorgeous and funny and smart. And gay, very gay. And I just went and invited Adam to our apartment to watch Doctor Who with us. Sebastian and Adam could fall for each other and Sam could meet a nice girl, and then I’ll be alone again. I just know I’m not ready to face Blaine on my own. How do I get better? How do I not let myself end up running back to him once he moves back here?”

“Make more friends. You mentioned Callie. I’m assuming that’s a girl. Invite her to do something. Build new healthy friendships.”

“In what imaginary extra time in the day will I do this? The best I can probably offer anyone else is being friendly. I don’t have the time or energy to put into another new friendship. I think I’m at my limit with befriending Sebastian and I live with him. Once the new semester starts, I will barely
“Look, Kurt, I’m not a psychiatrist, so I can’t prescribe any anti-anxiety medications, but I’m going to give you a packet of info on some natural options that have worked for some people. I am not endorsing any or all of them because as I mentioned, I am not a medical professional. But you’re a smart guy. Look up information and make up your own mind.”

He put the information he had been handed in his bag. “Alright. Besides ‘calm down’ what should I do?”

“What do you want to do?”

“Honestly? You probably don’t want to know the answer.”

“Tell me anyway.”

“I want someone find someone to take care of and I want someone who cares about me just because. Not because I got good grades or because I did a good job on a performance. But someone who genuinely just cares about me who I can take care of in return. One thing I’ve learned from all of this is that despite the constant negativity in the loft, I really do thrive on having someone to support. I like being there for people. I like being the person that other people can depend on.”

“You’re a nurturer. And you’ve lost your objects of affection.”

“Pretty much. I could dote on the girls without being accused of being forward because everyone knew it was completely platonic. You know? I could bring them a little something from a flea market or the vault. I could make them their favorite drink. I do that somewhat with Sam, but putting all that caring and whatnot into Adam or Sebastian – that’s not what I need to do because they’re gay and they could mistake my attention for romantic interest, whereas the girls couldn’t. Why am I such a mess? Making other people happy makes me happy. How am I ever going to get better? I’m exactly what people like Blaine are looking for.”

“You’re making a lot of progress. You really are. You’re examining yourself and you’re seeing both the good and not-so-good things about your past behaviors and no one gets better in a month. So, how about a compromise for now? You have this drive to take care of someone. What if you only allow yourself to act on that when there is a group?”

“What do you mean?”

“Like rather than making a meal for one person and putting all of the focus on that person’s enjoyment by serving every dish to fit that person’s tastes, try having more than one person there and maybe doing one small thing that would bring joy to each person present. Spread the happiness around without making yourself feel responsible to provide it completely. It could even be a pitch-in meal where your contributions are specifically tailored to the guests, but without making that obvious to anyone. Maybe you could feel a little of that ‘high’ you’re missing from being a people pleaser without putting yourself back into the position where that’s your only focus in life.”

“Interesting idea. I’ll think about it. I did already invite Adam over. I could make one thing that each of them likes.”

“Make your favorite thing too. That’s part of getting better – realizing that you don’t have to give up what you want in order for other people to be happy. You’re allowed to be happy too.”

Kurt nodded.
“You’re allowed to serve a dish that no one but you likes.”

Kurt’s eyes flashed.

“What just popped into your head?”

“Oh, just a memory. I like a particular type of ice cream that wasn’t anyone else’s favorite and whenever we’d go shopping, the kind I liked was never chosen. The reasoning was along the lines of what you just said. We shouldn’t spend money buying a flavor that only I really liked when there were other flavors that appealed to more people. It’s just a stupid little thing. I don’t even eat that much ice cream. I always just let it go, but when you said that, it popped into my head.”

“Tiny things like that are insidious in relationships. I can understand if it was something like peanut butter cup was your favorite and one of the people you lived with was allergic to peanuts. But that wasn’t the case. They all downplayed you and your wishes in so many ways that it’s hard to see them all right away.”

“You’re right. I bent. I was always the one who bent. What to eat, where to eat, what to watch, where to go, what to do. And it happened because I was so lonely that I was willing to give in just to not be alone. I would eat what I didn’t like, watch what didn’t interest me, do what other people wanted. At first, it was to make them happy, but in the end they got so used to it that if I didn’t go along with their ideas and suggested something different, they got aggravated. So, eventually I was doing everything the way other people wanted just to keep the peace. But then I cracked. I lost it and I started arguing back when it was down to just me and Blaine in the loft. Like the towel thing I told you about that was a wake up call for me.”

Kurt paused for a couple of minutes.

“I was more like that when I was younger. I used to stand stalwart and strong in my likes and choices. But slowly I lost that. I’m not thinking very clearly right now. Too many thought are flooding my mind at once. I know I told you about how things went with my first therapist. She told me that men argue to stay connected. I tried to work through what had happened with that ‘filter’ in mind. I eventually realized that she was wrong. I began arguing to reassert my individuality. But spending so much time viewing things the way she had me filter them has messed up my mind. I’m questioning whether anything I ever did was because I wanted to do it or because I was trying to get attention. Did I dress the way I did because it’s what I wanted to do or did I do it just to get attention and have a platform for telling other people not to tell me what to do? Or did I do it to keep people’s focus on something external about me? Or did I dress that way so I could feel above their hatred because I had style and they didn’t? It’s hard to know. Some of the stuff I wore was atrocious, but I just had to have it and wear it. I don’t even know.”

“I think this is the type of thing that using a journal helps with. Writing down enough of the memory or issue to jog your memory a second time. Making lists or charts or whatever helps you organize your thoughts. I can’t tell you who you are or why you did what you did. But if you write these things down, more than likely, you’ll be able to start to see some patterns and we can talk about them and their significance and work through issues.”

“Okay. I’ll get a notebook and try. Having so many thoughts floating around that feel like they need my attention is a constant distraction. Maybe putting them down on paper will give me away to deal with them. I know my time is up. Thanks for listening to me ramble.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll see you next week.”

Kurt left the office, and went to the stage combat practice room first. He knew he needed to get out
some aggression before he could settle down enough to work on his dance skills.

“So, the rumors ARE true.”

Kurt turned his head to make eye contact with Miss July. “If the rumors are that I’m back in the City and practicing my stage combat and dance skills on my own while taking a heavy load of classes that require me to write far too many papers, then they’re true.”

“I was referring to the rumor that you’ve come back lighter than you were in the spring.”

Kurt knew what she was referring to, but didn’t acknowledge that. “Well, at least the rumors aren’t that I got fat over the last six months.”

She laughed. “Only you, Hummel. If anyone was the epitome of a ball and chain, it’s your ex. I’m glad to see you’ve lightened your load. And I’m honestly pleased that I won’t have to listen to anymore incessant pleading about why I won’t approve him to move on past the basic dance class. And Berry has my condolences on flopping. I’ve been there, done that, but I’m sure you cautioned her against her decision. Let me see that last move again.”

Kurt got back into position and did as he was asked.

“Good leg extension. Make sure your shoulders are level.” She gave him a sequence of moves to perform followed by a three-jump, corner-to-corner run.

Once he had finished, he walked back to where she was standing.

“That was decent. I saw your name on my list for the Intermediate Dance 4 class for next semester. I just wanted to make sure that you were ready. You had Professor Migley last summer and I hadn’t seen you dance in nearly 7 months. You’ll be fine.”

“Thank you, Miss July.”

“You’ll need tap shoes, if you didn’t already know.”

“I’ll get some.”

Kurt and Sam walked in the door and found Sebastian in the kitchen.

“Hey, you two were running late, so I decided to go ahead and get started. I just started prepping the vegetables. I see you’ve been shopping.”

Kurt sat his bags down on the table and hung his coat in the closet. “Yeah, Miss July, my dance instructor, told me I’d need a pair of tap shoes for the spring class and since I don’t own any, I had to go buy some. Dance shoes are so expensive. I just spent a third of my weekly salary on these. But I’ve made the mistake of buying the less expensive shoes before and I ended up having to buy a second pair before the semester ended. I only buy real leather dance shoes now.”

“I agree. The leather ones really are far better. They mold to your foot shape after wearing them for a while, which really helps prevent blisters. I miss tapping.”

“I didn’t know you tapped. NYADA has extension classes. You don’t have to be a student to enroll.”
“That could be fun. I’ll have to look into it.”

Kurt took his bags back to his room and joined Sebastian and Sam in the food prep.

“I should have asked first, but if it’s not okay with you two, I’ll cancel. I invited Adam to join us to watch Doctor Who on Saturday.”

“Fine by me,” Sam said.

“Who’s Adam?” Sebastian asked.

Sam saw Kurt’s hesitance, so he answered. “He’s the first person Kurt made friends with when he started at NYADA. He was the first one lost to Blaine’s reclaiming of control over Kurt’s life.”

“He was the leader of NYADA’s show choir. He was a senior the year I started. He graduated, went back to London for a while, worked on the West End in a few shows. He’s back studying playwriting at Juilliard for this school year. He’s the alumni director for the show choir now.”

“So, you said he went back to London. I’m assuming that means he’s from England.”

“Essex.”

“And he’s a Doctor Who fan?”

“He introduced me to the show.”

“I see. Good man.”

Kurt and Sam laughed.

“So, it’s okay with you? I promise not to do this again – ask someone before I talk to the two of you. It was just such a surprise to run into him today at NYADA. We went and had coffee, well he had tea, and we talked for a little while. He’s definitely part of the keep ‘Kurt Away from Blaine Club’.”

“Well, then we can’t have one of the members of our exclusive club miss out on watching Doctor Who,” Sebastian said. “It’s fine.”

“Dani and Elliott are really the only two other people I spent time with before Blaine and everyone else came to the City. Dani and Santana dated, so she was around the loft a lot and she worked at the diner I worked at. That’s how I actually met her. Anyway, she and I weren’t close, but she was around quite a bit until Santana got back together with Brittany last spring. Not long after Blaine confronted Elliott last winter, he went on a yoga retreat. I hadn’t planned to let the band die, but I didn’t hear from Elliott for a while and then Dani’s roller derby team kept advancing and she was too busy with that to have time to get together to rehearse. The band just sort of dissolved without anyone talking about it. I haven’t seen Elliott in close to a year I guess. Now that I think about he, he would have graduated in May. So, he could have gone back to New Jersey to save on living expenses. After a while, I just wasn’t a good friend. I was too caught up in my own drama.”

“Well, if you do run into him at some point, I don’t mind you bringing people here that you know. I think I’d prefer it if you get to know any new people before inviting them here.”

“I understand. I’m not really in a position to start being really social. I’m not as busy right now, but that won’t be true when the spring semester starts. Plus being social eats into my bank account far too much. Even randomly going out for coffee isn’t really in my budget, but I didn’t just want to
say, ‘Hey Adam, let’s sit outside and freeze while we talk for a bit.’”

Sam and Sebastian laughed at him.

“You’re ridiculous,” Sam said.

“I think you mean ‘fabulous’.”

“I think that’s Mercedes’ line.”

Kurt kept his nose the grindstone the rest of the week. He spent every possible waking moment working on his schoolwork. He even skipped the dance studio Friday morning. The next week would be the last week before finals, and although he wouldn’t have any papers due for his NYADA classes that week, the same was not true for his other online courses.

He was looking forward to winter break, but he knew it would still be busy since Isabelle had secured extra hours for him citing that she needed him while he was available to help get everything under control and ready for the new year.

Saturday morning, he got up early to do yoga. Sam had already left for the coffee shop. He enjoyed the stillness and quiet of the early mornings on the weekends because those times were about as quiet as New York City ever got. Once he finished his work out, he put the mat up, and began baking.

He made snickerdoodles because he remembered how much Adam liked them. He made chocolate chip for Sebastian and peanut butter for Sam. And following the advice he had been given, he kept back a little of the dough from Sam’s cookies and added some chocolate chips and raisins – not because that combo was his favorite, but because any time he had suggested trying it, everyone thought it sounded gross and he never bothered attempting it. He also really liked walnuts in his chocolate chip cookies, so he added some to a tiny bit of the chocolate chip cookie dough. In the end, he made 8 cookies for himself.

While he was waiting to put trays of cookies in and take them out, he made a shopping list. He also looked through the journal he had been writing bits and pieces of information in. He seriously wondered about his own sanity. He had invited a man who had loved him back into his life when he, yet again, couldn’t be a decent romantic partner for anyone. He reminded himself that Adam was not under the impression that this was a date. Kurt had clearly invited him to watch Doctor Who with all three of them. But Adam kept holding his hand Tuesday. He knew Adam was a very physical person, much like Sam, but he didn’t want to lead him on in any way.

He switched gears completely and wrote out a short email to Mercedes giving her a little update and congratulating her on the release of her first CD that had dropped the day before and he had immediately downloaded. They had promised each other to try harder to stay in contact, but it was tough. When Kurt had the most clear head and least crowded schedule, it was either ridiculously early in LA, like at that moment it was just 4:30 in the morning. When he had time in the evenings before he went to bed, it was early evening in LA and Mercedes was out doing her thing. She was off tour until the new year, when she would start the tour to promote her new CD. She was opening for a popular R&B group that Kurt wasn’t really familiar with, and she had already promised him tickets when the tour moved to the East Coast.

He also took the time to email Dave. Kurt had learned that Dave had applied to one of the SUNY branches when Blaine had applied to NYU. He had gotten in, but after everything that happened,
he had found someone to sublet his apartment and he had moved to an efficiency in Columbus. He had applied to transfer to the main campus of OSU and had gotten a job in Columbus. It was a shock to Kurt to realize that Blaine had been planning to bring Dave to New York with him, but he had long given up hope to being able to understand Blaine’s plans.

Kurt managed to learn a lot about Blaine from his very minimal email interactions with Dave – things he didn’t want any more details about. He filed the information in the “Reasons to never get back with Blaine” list he had started in the middle of his journal. He figured he might need several pages by the time he was finished.

By 8:30, he had all of the cookies finished and packaged up and hidden away in a larger bowl in one of the lower cabinets. He made sure the kitchen was clean. He went back into the bedroom and got dressed. He could hear Sebastian in the shower. He went back in the living room to read. At 8:45, Sebastian came out. They had agreed to leave at 9:15 to go to Costco. They sat down and ate breakfast together before they left to go get groceries.

By the time they got back, Sam was home from work. The three of them worked together to get the groceries put away. Kurt turned some music on and they sang and prepped for the evening while snacking on the fruit and cheese they had bought for lunch. Sebastian and Sam prepped the vegetables they had bought to make chopped salad for dinner. Kurt chopped up sliced ham and turkey for the salads and got to work on the salad dressings. Sam made tea and Sebastian made lemonade.

“I think we’re set,” Kurt said, as they put everything in the refrigerator for later.

“I have studying to do, so I’ll see you all later.”

Sam said, “I think I’m going to take a nap. Getting up at 5:15 and staying up late tonight and getting back up at 5:15 is not enough sleep.” Sam did an impression of the genie from Aladdin. “Phenomenal cosmic power. Itty bitty living space.”

Kurt laughed. “You are so right.”
Chapter 16

Kurt’s phone buzzed in his pocket. “Adam must be here.” Kurt’s hands were covered in flour and couldn’t pull the phone out.

“Do you want me to go down and bring him up?” Sam asked.

“Would you?”

“Sure. I know you wanted to get those pretzels in the oven. If you go down, it will delay the whole process by like 15 minutes.”

“Thanks.”

Sam went down to the lobby and opened the door in the entryway.

“Adam?”

Adam looked up and looked a little confused. “Sam or Sebastian?”

Sam laughed. “Definitely Sam.” He reached out to shake hands. “Follow me.”

They stopped as soon as they got through the door and Sam signed him in before they headed to the elevator.

“I like the security,” Adam said.

“Me too.”

“I want to thank you for whatever you did to get him away from Blaine. He didn’t say what it was, but that doesn’t really matter to me. I’m just glad you were successful. He deserves someone who treats him well.”

“I agree. Just so you don’t get the wrong impression, I made my own mess of my relationship with Kurt by being friends with Blaine and well, I finally got help for my own problems and that let me get to a place where I could help Kurt.”

“I’m glad.”

The elevator stopped and they got out. Adam walked beside Sam on the way down the hall to the apartment. Sam opened the door. Within seconds of opening the door, Kurt was standing there.

“Adam!”

“Hey, Kurt. It smells fantastic in here. What are you baking?”

“Here let me take your coat and you can go see,” Sam said.

Adam slipped his coat and scarf off and handed it to Sam. “Thank you.”

Sam hung it up and then went to help Sebastian in the kitchen, leaving Kurt and Adam standing by the door.

“I brought you something. Sorry, no fancy wrapping.”
“You didn’t need to get me anything, but thank you.”

Adam unrolled what he had and held it up.

“Oh! It’s an Adam’s Apples hoodie.” Kurt stepped closer and took it. “This is my hoodie.”

“It is. I knew it was yours when I found it the day you left it in the auditorium before rehearsal. You probably figured that I gave it to the next person that joined that it fit.”

“I did. With what Rachel told me, I … I just figured someone else could get use out of it.” Since he had been baking, he was only wearing a t-shirt. He put the hoodie on and wiped his eyes. “Happy tears,” he said as he wiped his eyes. He reached out and offered Adam a hug. “Thank you.”

Adam wrapped his arms around Kurt. “You’re welcome. It looks perfect on you.”

“You never did answer me what the fabulous smell is.” He walked over to the kitchen where he could see Sebastian pulling a tray out of the oven. “Pretzels! They look fantastic.”

Sam followed him to the kitchen. “It’s been a unanimous decision that carbs don’t exist while watching Doctor Who.”

Adam laughed at him. “It must be true. All three of you are quite fit, so they seem to be having no deleterious effects on you.”

Sebastian sat the tray down on a rack to let them cool for a few minutes.

“Okay, so before we start, I’ll introduce everyone. Sebastian Smythe is a sophomore. I guess that’s not right. He’s a junior at Columbia, majoring in English and minoring in psychology. Sam Evans works at the coffee shop down the street and at Vogue. I’m a junior now and I’ve gone back to work at Vogue. And Adam Crawford graduated from NYADA a year and a half ago and is now on a fellowship studying playwriting at Juilliard.”

Sebastian reached out and shook hands with Adam. “Nice to meet you.”

Adam smiled. “You too.”

Kurt stepped next to Sebastian and took the first pretzel and took a tentative bite. “Not too hot. Go ahead.”

Everyone else grabbed a pretzel. They all stood around enjoying what amounted to being their appetizer.

Sam spoke up. “We have tea, lemonade, and water.”

Sebastian said, “American lemonade and iced tea.”

Adam laughed. “I’ve gotten used to that.”

Sam looked confused.

Adam added, “In England, and a lot of other places, lemonade is more like what you call Sprite. And tea is not typically served sweet and cold. But I have actually grown accustomed to both American incarnations. I’ll have some lemonade please.”

Sam poured a glass of lemonade for Adam. The other three got their own drinks.
“We’ve made a huge chopped salad for dinner. I made that dressing you like and I also made ranch dressing for Sam. Sebastian likes both, so he can have whichever he wants.” Kurt pulled the four salads out that they had made earlier and the two bottles of dressing.” He pointed to one of the bowls. “That one’s yours. I left the hot peppers out because I didn’t know whether you liked them. There are some left if you want to add some.”

“I’ll have a few.”

Kurt pulled a small bowl out and handed him a spoon. He sprinkled a spoonful on his salad. Kurt put the bowl back and the spoon in the dishwasher. They each selected a dressing and added it. They grabbed their forks and drinks, and then walked around to the sofa to sit down. Kurt grabbed the remote and sat down between Sam and Adam. Sebastian had sat down on the other side of the sectional. Sebastian reached over and turned the lamp on the bookcase off.

“And now we watch.” Kurt pressed play.

They ate and watched two episodes before Kurt paused the DVD. “Dessert?” He stood up and collected everyone’s bowls and forks.

“Sure,” Sam said. “I love guiltless carb night. What did you make? I didn’t see anything anywhere.”

“Go ahead and press play, if you want.” Kurt pulled the cookies he had hidden earlier out and plated some of them. He took them back with him to the couch and handed the plate to Adam first.

“Snickerdoodles. You remembered.”

Kurt smiled. He took a couple of the peanut butter, chocolate chip, raisin cookies and a chocolate chip cookie with walnuts for himself and passed the plate to Sam.

“Peanut butter. My favorite. What are these other ones that look sort of like peanut butter cookies?”

“Oh, something I always wanted to try just for fun. They’re peanut butter, chocolate chip, raisin.”

“Sounds interesting.” He took one of them and a few regular peanut butter cookies and passed the plate to Sebastian.

Sebastian saw that his favorites were on the plate as well. “I will say that Americans got one thing right – chocolate chip cookies.”

“Americans? Aren’t you American?” Adam asked.

“As if,” Sebastian snarked.

Kurt laughed. “He’s half American. He just doesn’t admit it if he can avoid it.”

“I’m French.”

“Well, you’ve lived in America longer than you lived in France, so you’re more American now.”

“That’s insulting. How long I live here will not change that I am French.”

Adam was laughing. “Spoken like a true Frenchman.”

Sebastian nodded. “No amount of time living here will turn me into a football-loving, beer-
“drinking, close-minded, bigoted American.”

“Uh huh,” Sam said.

“Although these two have softened my stance a little.”

“I hope so,” Kurt said. “First impressions aren’t always the best. Just think if I had decided that all Frenchmen were the way you portrayed yourself when we first met.”

Sebastian about choked. “Fine, fine. You win. I was an ass.”

“That’s true, but you grew up and now we’re friends.”

“I know. You even made my favorite cookies.”

“A few of them have walnuts. I like them that way, so I made a few with walnuts.”

“I’ll give one a try.” He turned the light back on momentarily so he could see which ones had walnuts. He took one and a couple of regular chocolate chip ones. He put the plate on the shelf and turned the light back off.

Kurt picked the remote back up and hit play. By the end of three more episodes, there were no more cookies on the plate. Kurt grabbed the plate and got up to put it in the dishwasher.

“You three are welcome to continue or to switch to something else, but I need my beauty sleep. We have extra sheets and a comforter if you want to sleep on the couch rather than head out into the freezing cold so late. I’ll put the storage tote in the alcove if you decide you want to stay.”

Adam stood up and took his glass to the kitchen. He sat it on the counter behind the half wall. “At least let me say goodnight before you disappear.” He opened his arms and Kurt stepped into the hug. “Thank you for inviting me.” He let go of Kurt.

“You’re welcome. And you’re welcome to stay longer if you want. I just get up really early to do schoolwork every day, Sundays included.”

“Night, Kurt.”

Kurt smiled and headed to his room. He put the tote out and shut the door.

Sam was the first to speak. “I think he wants us to get to know each other. He did this before with me and Sebastian not long after we moved in. I think he wants to not feel like he’s the center of everything, if that makes sense. It’s kind of hard to explain. Kurt ended up being shoved into the role of mediator in the loft.”

“I saw that with Rachel and Santana.”

“I cannot imagine living with those two.”

“You know them?”

“I know all of the McKinley crew. I attended the school that Kurt went to his junior year, where he met Blaine. He had gone back to McKinley late in the spring, and then Blaine joined him there in the fall, which was when I moved to Ohio. So, I didn’t actually go to school with either of them, but we were show choir rivals. A lot of stupid high school stuff went on. All water under the bridge.
now according to Kurt. But yes, I know all of them and I would seriously go insane living with Rachel. Adding Santana into it – no way. Then, after graduation, Blaine and Sam moved in with them.”

“One bathroom, five people. No walls. It was all drama, all the time.”

Sebastian said, “I guess I never realized when he called it a loft, he really meant no walls.”

“Yeah. There were curtains that blocked off the two bedrooms. Anyway, I think we’re the only three people he has any intention of interacting with for the foreseeable future and he just wants us to get along without him having to be the ring leader.”

“Well, I’m a pretty laid back chap. I’m more of a lover than a fighter.”

“Kurt’s only ever said nice things about you,” Sam said.

“Well, he’s an amazing person.”

“I think we all agree on that,” Sam said.

“The fact that he’s not in jail for killing Rachel or Santana, or both, puts him up near sainthood,” Sebastian said.

“Nothing against the décor in here, but what happened to all of Kurt’s quirky vintage stuff?”

“He sold it all off when Rachel left and didn’t come back.”

“Wait. Rachel’s gone? Kurt didn’t really talk about Rachel when he explained what happened. Honestly, I didn’t think to ask why she was in Ohio because it didn’t really matter to me. She never was a good friend to him from what I could see.”

Sam launched into the story of Rachel getting Fanny, and then quitting only for her TV show to flop.

“That’s one heck of a story. Small town girl gets her dream only to give it up and end up back in her small town. She was full of herself, sure. But I never imagined her to be so shortsighted.”

“Kurt begged her not to do it.”

“I can imagine.”

They sat around talking for a while longer. Sam brought their conversation to a close.

“I think we’re the three people that Kurt has chosen to trust. I know it might seem weird to the three of us because none of us really knew each other before, but Kurt is the best friend I’ve ever had and he’s forgiven me for the crap I put him through. I want to be here for him this time. So, I’m game if the two of you are. Even if all we ever do together as a group is sit together and eat while we watch sci fi shows.”

“You already know that I’m in,” Sebastian said.

“I would never turn down spending time with him if I’m free when he asks. Currently my visa is only good through the middle of June, but nothing is written in stone. If someone is interested in staging one of my plays or I get a role in something here in New York, I’ll apply for a work visa rather than an educational one.”
“So, do you want to stay? I’ll go grab those bed linens,” Sebastian said.

“Sure. It’s late and freezing cold outside. If you could show me the bathroom, that would be great.”

Sebastian led Adam to his bathroom since Kurt had already gone to bed. Sam slipped into their room very quietly and grabbed something for Adam to sleep in and took the clothes into Sebastian’s room. He waited for Adam to open the door and he offered them to him.

“Thanks. I’ll just change and come right back out.”

Sam went out to the living room and put the sheets, pillows, and comforter on the sofa. Sebastian was in the kitchen straightening up and waiting for Adam to come back out. Sam went back to the bedroom to go to sleep.

When Adam came back, Sebastian said, “I’m sure that they’ll both do their best not to wake you, but just so you’re not startled, Kurt usually does yoga and eats breakfast really early in the morning and Sam has to be at the coffee shop at 6:00. Feel free to put your clothes in the washer if you want. That way you’ll have something to wear in the morning.”

“Thanks for telling me and for your hospitality in general.”

“You’re welcome. The washer and dryer are in the closet on the left in the hallway. In the morning, if you stick around until after 8:00, I’ll add you to the approved list of visitors and you’ll be able to get in the building without one of us coming down to meet you every time.”

“We’ve only met tonight and you’re willing to add me?”

“From everything I’ve learned this evening, you’ve only ever had Kurt’s best interests at heart. That’s more than I can say for anyone else he’s ever known. So, yes. Feel free to watch anything we have. Or read anything on the shelf.”

Sebastian turned the kitchen light out, checked the locks, and went to bed, leaving Adam sitting on the sofa. He grabbed his clothes and tossed them in the washer on a short cycle, and then turned the lamp off and lay down.

Kurt stayed in his room and did his yoga workout and worked on a couple of assignments before he headed out to the kitchen. He was as quiet as possible, but unfortunately the coffee pot made just enough noise that it woke Adam up.

He sat up and stretched.

“I’m sorry, Adam. I didn’t think the coffee pot was that noisy.”

“It’s fine, love. The first few times I sleep somewhere new, I wake up easily. Plus, the sun’s coming up and I’m sure that started the wake-up process before the coffee pot did.”

“Would you like a cup? I’ll brew another.”

“No thank you, but if you have some tea, I could go for a cuppa.”

“I do have tea. I’ll just put the kettle on.”

“Sebastian seems a nice chap.”
“He has his own story to tell, but he’s grown up a lot. We’ve moved on past the ass-hattery of high school rivals. I think in time, we’ll be good friends.”

“Sam’s a sweetheart.”

“Sam is a sweetheart. If he liked guys, I would have asked him out years ago and we’d be married by now and have kids in a few years.”

Adam laughed.

“Oh, I am absolutely serious. He’s had a long line of girlfriends who didn’t appreciate him. If he had gone out with me instead of them when he first came to McKinley, none of them would have broken his heart and we’d still be together.”

“I see.”

“Enough of my ‘if Sam liked guys’ musings for the day.” Kurt laughed. “I got over my crush about a week after we met when he started dating the head cheerleader, and now we have an epic bromance going on.” Kurt poured the hot water into a cup with a tea bag and put it next to Adam on the counter. He pulled a spoon out and put the honey jar on the counter.

“Bromance?”

“Yes. He’s the only straight guy to ever treat me like I’m a guy. Shoulder bumps, calling me ‘dude’ and getting away with it, hugging me like I’m not disease-ridden, inviting me to do guy things like play video games. Stuff like that. He lived with Carole and Finn for longer than I did. He’s like my brother. He screwed that up for a while, but things are good again now. Wait, do you even know about Finn.”

“Well, I remember you talking about your stepbrother and stepmother, but you mostly told me things about your dad.”

“Finn died.”

“I didn’t know. Was it recent?”

“No, it was actually just a few weeks after the engagement, in early April. He was 19.”

“That’s really sad. I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Thanks. He was in Ohio and I was here, just like I thought it would always be. Sometimes, it felt like it never happened, like he’d still be there if I went home, but I went back in September and it was so much more real there. No one clomping up the stairs, no one eating all of the food, no one yelling at video games, no one playing the drums. It took me a while to get used to the amount of noise one person could cause. And when I went back, it was silent.”

Kurt couldn’t continue to talk about it, so he opened the fridge and put the milk on the counter for Adam. He pulled out a carton of eggs, some cheese, and some leftover chopped veggies from the salads from the night before. He pulled out a large skillet and heated some butter on low while he whipped together the ingredients for the omelettes. When they were nearly finished, he asked Adam to go get Sebastian. While he was gone, he plated all three omelettes and put them on the table. He moved Adam’s tea and his coffee to the table and poured a glass of juice for Sebastian. The two of them came and sat down.

“Thanks. You don’t have to make breakfast for me every weekend, you know.”
“I know, but I like to.”

Adam started to eat. “Delicious, as always. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. You’re welcome to use our bathroom and shower. I think I even have an unopened toothbrush from the last multi-pack I bought. I’m sure that Sam has something suitable for you to wear.”

“Oh, actually Sebastian showed me where the washer was last night. I just need to move everything to the dryer and I’ll be set. I’ll go do that while we eat.”

Adam put his clothes in the dryer. When he sat back down, he could tell that Kurt still wasn’t ready to talk yet, so he asked Sebastian about Columbia and managed to get him talking for a while.

Once they finished eating, Sebastian offered to clean up. Adam grabbed his stuff from the dryer and Kurt showed Adam to the bathroom. Kurt changed into jeans and his Apples hoodie while Adam was in the shower. He was sitting at his desk when Adam came back out.

“Sebastian said something about taking me down to the security office.”


“Is now a good time to go downstairs?” Adam asked.

“Oh, sure. Do you have driver’s license or some kind of official ID with you?”

“I do.”

“Perfect. We’ll be back up as soon as we’re done, unless you need to go now.”

“Not necessarily. I just wanted to go ahead and do it now and not interrupt you once you started studying or mess up your schedule if you need to go somewhere.” He followed Sebastian to the door.

Kurt went back to his room and washed his face and did his morning moisturizing.

Sebastian grabbed some shoes and put them on. He opened the door and led Adam to the elevator.

“Kurt said this is your place?”

“Yes, a graduation gift from my jackass father.”

“Nice gift.”

“I’d trade it for a nice father. Or better yet – keep the nice apartment AND have a nice father.”

Adam laughed. “I’m glad you had the room and that he’s not living with Rachel anymore. That was just bad for him. She just … I’ll just leave that. So, your father is American and your mother is French?”

“Was. My mother died, which is how I ended up in Ohio to finish high school.”

“I see. I’m sorry for your loss.”

“That was one of the major underlying issues resulting in my jackass behavior when Kurt and I first met. I’d been in Ohio for about four months.”
“And not happy about it.”

“That would be a giant understatement.”

“Kurt’s a very forgiving person.”

“He is. And don’t worry. I don’t intend to take advantage of that.”

The elevator opened and Adam followed Sebastian to the security office.

“Good morning, Mr. Smythe. What can I do for you today?”

“I’d like to add Adam to our list of allowed visitors, please.”

“Yes, sir. Please step in. I’ll just need a copy of your driver’s license or official ID.”

Adam took his license out and handed it to the security officer.

“Thank you, Mr. Crawford. I’ll just make a copy to put on file and scan it to put it in our system.” When he finished, he handed Adam’s license back. “When we’ve gotten your background check back, you’ll be able to show your license at the entrance and you’ll be let in. We have security cameras on each floor. We have a no solicitation policy. Here are a list of the rules for guests in our building.”

Adam took the sheet of paper. Sebastian stood up. “Thank you.”

“Enjoy your day, sirs.”

“You too,” Adam said.

The two of them headed back upstairs. “I think it would be best if you call one of us as you come up in the elevator. That way no one is startled by a surprise knock on the door.”

“I can do that.” Adam got his phone out and handed it to Sebastian. “Can you put your number and Sam’s in?”

“Sure.” He handed back when he finished. “Do you have somewhere you need to be?”

“Not really. I don’t work on the weekends. I decided that if I was only going to get to spend 9 more months in New York that I would do a better job of enjoying the City itself this time around.”

Sebastian opened the door to let them back in the apartment. Kurt was in the kitchen mixing something. After Adam stepped in, Sebastian reached back and locked the door. He slipped his shoes off and put them back in the shoe dresser.

“I’ve found a new potential member of the ‘Explore New York City’ club.”

“Oooh. Really?” Kurt said coyly. “It’s very exclusive. Very high standards to get in. You’re sure this potential member lives up to them?” He laughed. “I’ll have to get around to making official membership cards.”

“Count me in – that is if my application makes it through the very rigorous vetting process of joining such an exclusive club.”

“We should all make a list of the places we want to see that we either haven’t been to or loved so much the first time that we want to go back. We can compare our lists and schedule our
explorations. Sam and I made it to the Macy’s Parade this year.”

“What are you making?” Sebastian asked. “It looks like more pretzels.”

“Similar, but not quite. I’m making pizza dough. We still have chopped vegetables left. I thought I’d make some pizza sauce and we can have pizza for lunch. I can put them in so they’ll be done when Sam gets home. You’re welcome stay, Adam.”

“Sounds delicious,” Adam said.

“I know that Sebastian and I have schoolwork to get back to at some point, but Sam usually just hangs out and watches movies or plays his guitar. I’m sure he wouldn’t mind the company. Feel free to watch or read whatever you want until lunch.”

The following week, Kurt continued to go to NYADA in the mornings to work out and dance. He spent an hour with the Apples on Monday and went to his counseling session on Tuesday. He spent the rest of his mornings after his workouts doing research and studying in the NYADA library.

Sam went to work every morning at the coffee shop.

He and Sam ate lunch together at the apartment before they headed to work at Vogue every afternoon.

They only time they saw Sebastian was in the evening for dinner. He was usually still in his room when Kurt left in the mornings and he was gone when they came home for lunch. He and Kurt spent most evenings holed up in the bedrooms working on schoolwork.

Both of them were so caught up in their work that neither of them noticed Sam had been leaving for several hours after dinner the last couple of weeks and then coming back around 10:00, showering, and then going to bed.

Saturday when Sam came home from the coffee shop, Kurt and Sebastian were finishing up making lunch. Sam changed clothes and came back. They sat down to eat.

“I like the table runner. That’s what it’s called, right? Did you guys find an indoor flea market or something this morning when you went to Costco?”

“It is and we did go to one flea market. I found a booth with a bunch of vintage seasonal fabric in it. I bought several different ones. I thought it would be fun. When we came back, I made this table runner. The other side is a nice muted spring floral pattern, so we can turn it over in a couple of months. I’ll do the others at some point in time. I haven’t sewn or made anything in a long time, so it was a nice break from studying.”

“Well, it’s festive. I like it.”

Kurt smiled.

Sam continued, “So, we’re still on for going to NYADA this afternoon to watch the drama majors perform their one-act plays, right?”

“Yeah. You said they’re one-act plays written by the advanced playwriting course students, right?”
Sebastian asked.

“Yes.”

“Should be interesting.”

“Afterwards, we’re going skating with the Apples, unless you don’t have time or something.”

“I want to go,” Sebastian said. “I’ve never been skating at Rockefeller Center. It’s one of those things I should definitely do at least once. It was actually on my list, which I am still working on.”

“I’ve not been before either. And it’s on my list as well,” Kurt said.

“Me too.”

“You’re sure they won’t mind if we tag along?” Sebastian asked.

“I’m sure. You already met Adam. The rest of the Apples are really nice too. Definitely an eclectic group of people. They can all sing well enough, but most of them are not voice or musical theatre majors. Adam created the group so that people who loved music could still sing and perform together just for the joy of it. Being in the group is actually a form of social suicide at NYADA, so don’t expect to meet a bunch of Rachel clones.”

Sebastian snorted, but managed to get himself together and keep quiet and continued to eat.

Sam told stories of a couple of crazy customers he’d had to wait on that morning and had both of them laughing. Once they finished, they cleaned everything up and bundled up to go see the plays.

After parting ways at Rockefeller Center, the three of them headed back to the apartment. When they got off the subway, Kurt walked at a faster clip than normal. Sam and Sebastian were both slightly taller than him, so they had no trouble keeping up. Sebastian opened the door to the building and Kurt put in the passcode and they stepped inside. They were greeted by the security officer after they stepped inside. Kurt headed straight for the elevator and pushed the button.

“Cold?” Sam asked.

“Not particularly more so than any other winter day,” Kurt answered.

“Oh. Just wondered. You were moving at quite a clip outside.”

Kurt didn’t respond. He got in the elevator and pressed the button quickly. Once the elevator door reopened, he made a beeline for their apartment door and unlocked it quickly and went inside.

“I’m going to shower, if no one minds. I’ll help with dinner when I get out.”

“We can get started. It’s fine,” Sam said. “Take your time.”

As soon as he had hung up his coat, Kurt disappeared into the bedroom, closing the door behind him.

“Something’s up,” Sam said.

“I noticed, but I have no idea what to say.”
“He’s been edgy walking back from the subway after work all week. I just thought maybe the cold was getting to him and he was trying to get inside as quickly as possible. Now, I’m not so sure.”

They worked together to get everything cooking. Sam suddenly stopped. Sebastian almost tripped over him.

“What?”

“I bet I know. It’s been a year since he was in the hospital. I’m betting the cold weather and it getting dark so early is bringing those memories back to the forefront.”

“You may be right. But he has you to come home with after work so that should help.”

“I’m sure it does, but I’m not going to bring it up if he doesn’t.”

“Okay. Did you find the DVDs you wanted us to watch?”

“I did. I found them online pretty cheap. They were in the mail yesterday. There are three movies, but I found out when I started searching for them that it’s going to be a weekly series now. The first episode aired last night. I recorded it. If you two don’t like the movies, I’ll just watch the TV show myself.”

Sebastian checked on the food. “I think everything’s done.”

“I’ll go check on him.” Sam knocked and opened the door. “Kurt?”

“Yeah, in here still.”

The bathroom door was ajar. He could see Kurt standing in his pajamas putting moisturizer on. He stepped out still rubbing it in.

“Dinner’s done.”

“Okay.”

“You’ve been crying.”

“Um. Yeah. I’m just on edge. I’ll be fine. I’ll be right out. I’m going to grab some warm socks.”

Sam left the room and left Kurt to get himself together. He went back to the kitchen. “He’s coming. Let’s go ahead and start to serve ourselves. He’ll be out in a minute.”

They plated their food and sat down at the table. Kurt came out a few minutes later and joined them. When it was obvious that Kurt wasn’t going to start the conversation like he usually did, Sebastian started talking about the plays. That broke the ice and the conversation lasted through the whole meal.

“Okay, so I think this show will appeal to all of us because it’s a mix of history, literature, and sci-fi.” Sam turned off the lamp and sat down next to Kurt and pressed play.


“It’s old. This movie aired in 2004.”
“No wonder I’ve never heard of it. I was in France back then and we were all like 9 or 10 years old.”

They all quieted down and watched.

Sam was awakened during the night by Kurt thrashing around in the bed. He reached over and put his hand on Kurt’s shoulder gently, but firmly. “Kurt.”

Kurt didn’t wake up.

Sam spoke a little louder. “Kurt. Wake up. You’re fine.”

Kurt stopped thrashing and sat up. “Sam?”

“Yeah. You’re in bed with me. Lie back down.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine. I knew something was bothering you, but I figured you’d tell me whenever you were ready to.”

“I’ve been having some flashbacks and nightmares about what happened last year.”

“That’s what I thought.” Sam moved his arm and made room for Kurt to snuggle up. “C’mere.”

Kurt slid over and laid his head on Sam’s chest. “The flashbacks are triggering other memories too and I guess tonight they all just decided to converge on me at once. If I kicked you or something, I’m sorry.”

“You’re fine. I’m fine.” Sam wrapped his arm around Kurt and they both fell back asleep.

Sunday morning, Sam’s alarm went off and he woke up and Kurt was still lying on his shoulder. Kurt usually got up by the time he was leaving, but he was sound asleep. Sam hated waking him up, so he tried to scoot free carefully, but Kurt woke up.

“Sorry. I have to go to work.”

“It’s fine. I might try to go back to sleep for a bit. Thanks for last night.”

“Anytime.” Sam went in the bathroom to get ready. When he came out, Kurt was sitting up in bed. He got up and gave Sam a hug before he left. “Be careful.”

“I will.”

He couldn’t manage to fall back asleep. Even after doing his yoga workout, he was too restless to study, so he made breakfast for Sebastian again. He knew Sebastian was up because he had heard the shower running a little earlier. He knocked on his bedroom door.

“Come in.”

Kurt opened the door. “I made you breakfast, if you’re hungry.”
“Sure.” He followed Kurt back out to the dining table where he found his plate already on the table with a glass of juice.

“I know it’s weird. Just go with it. I used up the leftover tortillas from the other night and well, it’s a breakfast burrito. If you hate it, you don’t have to eat it.”

“You haven’t poisoned me yet,” he teased and put a bite in his mouth. After he swallowed he said, “That’s actually really good. Different, but tasty.”

Kurt smiled and ate his own burrito. They finished eating in silence. Sebastian got up and put his dishes in the dishwasher.

“Thanks. You really don’t have to cook breakfast for me every weekend.”

“I know. Please, just let me, okay? Without feeling bad that I do it for you.”

“Alright. I have a couple of study groups meeting today. I’m not sure when I’ll be back. I’ll see you later.” Sebastian put his coat on, grabbed his backpack, and left, leaving Kurt alone in the apartment.

He spent the morning writing the conclusion to his final French paper. Once he was done, he put some dance clothes and shoes on and turned some music on and danced. He took a quick shower and changed afterward. He put in a load of laundry and started reviewing for one of his final exams.

When Sam’s shift ended, he texted Kurt to tell him that he wouldn’t be home for a while. Kurt just kept studying. When he realized that it was dark outside, he stepped into the alcove and saw that Sebastian’s bedroom door was open and completely dark. He went out into the living area and realized that he was still home alone. He went ahead and prepped dinner and put it in the oven to bake.

While the casserole baked, he pulled his French paper up and read through it carefully one final time to check for any mistakes he could find. He had almost finished when he heard the front door open and then close. Kurt went out to the living room.

“Hey, Kurt. How’s it going?” Sebastian hung his coat up and took his boots off.

“Alright. I have a question for you, well a favor to ask actually.”

“What?”

“Will you read through my final French paper and just tell me if you see anything I obviously messed up? Not reading it for content. It’s just that I’ve read it so many times now that I’m not sure that I would notice a misspelled word.”

“Um, sure.” He followed Kurt into his room.

“Come on in. You can sit at the desk.”

Sebastian sat down and began to read through Kurt’s paper. Kurt lay back on the bed and closed his eyes while he waited. He wondered where Sam was. About 15 minutes later, Sebastian turned towards him.

“I don’t see any mistakes at all. It’s actually really well written. I think you’ll get a good grade.”
“Thanks.”

“We should spend more time speaking in French. I miss it. I just need to get it into my head that you actually speak French. I’m still getting used to the new me and the new you.”

“The version of us where we don’t snipe at each other all the time?”

“It could be fun. I haven’t had any good verbal sparring partners in a while.”

“Maybe some day. I’m back in training. I let life beat the crap out of me a few too many times to put up a good fight right now.”

“I get that. If you had known my weaknesses back then, you could have hit below the belt like I did.”

“I’m glad I didn’t. It would just be one more thing to be disappointed in myself about. What I said was bad enough.”

“Where’s Sam?”

“I don’t actually know. He didn’t come home after work. He texted saying that he wasn’t coming back for a while, but it’s been longer than a while. I’m going to text him and see if he’s going to be here soon or whether we should eat without him.”

“Will you read my French paper? Maybe my English paper too. I’m where you are. I’ve read them so many times that I may be reading right over something.”

“Sure.” Kurt got up and powered his laptop down and then went to Sebastian’s room. He texted Sam while he stood in the doorway waiting for Sebastian to open the documents he wanted Kurt to read. He sat down in Sebastian’s chair and started to read.

“‘Chausseurs has an extra S in the middle.”

Sebastian laughed.

Kurt continued to read. Once he was finished he looked up. “I can’t make any comments on the validity of your thesis because I’ve only read one of the books you’ve written about, but your argument seems strong. You have quotes and historical evidence to back up your idea.”

Sebastian reached over and deleted the extra S and hit save. He double-clicked his English paper. Kurt began to read that. His phone pinged and he looked at the text and then went back to reading.

He switched back to English. “I don’t see any grammatical or spelling mistakes. I’ve not read any of the books you’ve written about in this paper though. And Sam will be here in 20 minutes.” Kurt stood up to let Sebastian sit back down.

He closed the files. “Thanks for reading them.”

“Any time. When are your finals this week?” Kurt stood near the window by Sebastian’s closet.

“I have four. One Monday, two on Wednesday, and one on Thursday. Plus these two papers are due on Tuesday. What about you?” He closed the files and powered the laptop down.

“The paper you just read is due tomorrow by noon. I’ve written one other one that’s due tonight by 11:59. And I have one online final to take tomorrow. I can download the questions starting at noon and I have to put my responses in the dropbox within three hours of downloading it and it can’t be
turned in later than 11:59pm tomorrow. I’ll be taking that as soon as I eat dinner tomorrow evening. I have two in-person finals to take a NYADA one on Wednesday and one Thursday.”

The oven started beeping. Kurt left the room to go turn the oven off. Sebastian followed him out to the kitchen. He set the table and got out three plates, while Kurt pulled the casserole out of the oven. Kurt grabbed three glasses and filled them with water and put them on the table.

Sam came in. “Sorry. I’ll explain after we eat.” He hung his coat up and washed his hands. They served themselves and sat down to eat.

“Are we actually going to try baking next weekend?” Sebastian asked. “I love the idea, but I don’t really know who we would give what we bake to. We can give Isabelle a few things, but we both know that she doesn’t eat much in the way of desserts. And everyone who works in her office is on a diet. And I don’t have any other friends besides the two of you.”

“I know. I was thinking about that this week. I really wanted to do it, but we don’t need two tons of sweets here for the three of us. We don’t have enough freezer space to store very many things since we use it for our regular food. Adam may knows quite a few people, but I’m pretty sure that he would feel weird having all four of us bake things for people he knows.”

“Sweets are not the kind of thing that go over well at a school where everyone is concerned with their appearance, so taking a bunch to NYADA isn’t a good idea. There’s the security guards. We could make them a cake or cookies that don’t have to be refrigerated and they could put them in the office and snack on them until there gone.”

They finished eating in silence, no one knowing what to say. When they finished, Sam stood up and stacked everyone’s plates and put them in the dishwasher. He washed the rest of the dishes and put them in the dish drain.

“Can you two sit on the sofa, please? And close your eyes.”

Kurt and Sebastian did as they were asked. They heard the door to the apartment open and then close back a couple of minutes later. Sam walked from the door to the living room area twice. He placed four canvases, approximately .75m x 1.25m, leaned against the TV cabinet before he sat down in between them.

“Okay. You can open them.”

“Oh, Sam! They’re beautiful.”

“They really are.”

“So, this is what I’ve been doing when I’ve been gone in the evenings while you two have been studying and where I was this afternoon. One of the other baristas at the coffee shop is an art student. There’s this studio space not far from here and she’s been letting me go with her.” Sam told how he had managed to take photos from one of the apartments that faces Central Park. “So, I used the photos and created these from them.”

“Are you selling them?” Sebastian asked.

“No. They’re for us. Well, I shouldn’t assume. I was hoping to hang all four of them on the wall behind the sofa. I thought it would be an interesting faux view since the windows in the apartment face a street and on the other side of the street is another apartment building.”

“I’d buy these. You’re really talented.”
“Thanks. I’ve never sold any of my stuff. All of the stuff I did in high school is at my parents’ place in Kentucky. These are the first things I’ve painted since I graduated. When I came here, I just brought a duffle of clothes and my backpack. I couldn’t stand to be there anymore and I bought a one-way ticket toward the end of the summer.”

“I bet you could get into art school.”

“I guess that’s possible, but I don’t know what the point would be. Unless there are art schools that aren’t expensive and they have some sort of job training as part of coursework. I just don’t know what I could do as an artist that would be pay consistently enough to live on other than being an art teacher. Plus my high school grades are not good. And my SAT scores were worse.”

“I can’t honestly say because I never looked into art schools, but I know that CUNY and SUNY schools are reasonably priced for in-state students. I don’t remember the exact rules for being considered a resident. I just remember that I didn’t count because I’ve been a student here or something.”

“I’ll look. Not saying that I’ll apply, but looking can’t hurt anything.”

“Back to the question of hanging them. Definitely. Would you be opposed to me having them framed?”

“No.”

“Alright. I’m going to take them and have them framed. We can hang them once I pick them back up. I’d be interested in commissioning you to paint other pieces for the apartment. If you’re interested in selling them, I can photograph them so I can show my dad to get him to authorize a cash payment. I mean we can just hang them, but if you don’t plan to take them with you at some point in the future, you could just let me buy them from you and you’d have money to buy more supplies to do more artwork.”

“We can talk about what you’d want. I don’t have any idea how much to sell them for.”

“We can work on that too. I’ll take them to get them framed tomorrow after my final.”

The Apples that didn’t have exams at 11:00 got together and sang Christmas songs for an hour just for the fun of it. Afterwards, Kurt and Adam went out to lunch. Once they were seated, they started chatting.

“You know you don’t owe me for coming over last weekend.”

“I know. Next time we plan a marathon, I’ll bring something to contribute though. Any idea when that might be?”

“Actually I don’t. Other than this small break with you, I’ve been studying in my free time. I have a final I have to take when I get home this evening and an event after work Wednesday and Thursday. It’s a lot of fun and everything I always thought I’d never get to do, but being there as someone’s PA is different than going as a guest. I do get to wear the latest fashions and see them up close and personal rather than just in a magazine though. And it’s extra money, which I can definitely use. Starting next week, I’m working full time most days during the break, 9-6.”

“You get some time off too, yeah?”
“Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday of next week. I only get New Year’s Day off the following week.”

“Are you going to Ohio?”

“No. I’m spending time with my dad in DC. He didn’t run for re-election so his term is almost over. The lease on their place there ends this month. I’m not sure what Carole is doing. It’s just hard. Sam and I spent a few weeks there after I left Lima and before I came back here. It was easier with Sam with me as a buffer. We went sightseeing in the mornings and I did schoolwork most of the rest of the day, besides trying to spend a little time with my dad each evening. I don’t know. They were hardly home during the 6 weeks that I was in Lima this fall. They came back the first weekend. And they came back for the wedding since my dad was the officiant. But they were mostly in DC. I’m a constant reminder of what they lost. Maybe I just feel this way more around the holidays.”

“I see.”

“Excuse me for just a minute.” Kurt pulled out the journal he’d been writing in and wrote something down. He put it back in his bag when he finished. “Sorry about that. The counselor told me to write down issues that pop into my mind so I can try to get them organized somewhere to help me figure things out.”

“Is that helping?”

“I think so. At least I feel like I don’t have to figure something out right at the moment the idea or issue pops into my head. It’s like being able to put something in a project folder so that I can assemble everything later – like collecting pieces and parts for a costume and being able to piece it together over time.”

“Interesting way to tackle issues.”

“I have so many that I was feeling bombarded to the point of not being able to deal with any of them. I think it’s helping me work on immediate issues and not feel like I’m drowning.” Kurt didn’t want every time he spent time with Adam to turn into hashing through his issues, so he changed the subject quickly. “So, tell me about what you did on the West End and about the fellowship at Juilliard.”

Adam spent the rest of their lunch together talking about what he done in London, visiting his family in Essex, and what he was working on script-wise. Once they finished, Kurt took Adam with him to Vogue to see his office. Once Kurt had given him a small tour, he walked Adam back downstairs. Kurt offered him a hug, which he accepted. Kurt went back up to his office to get started on time and Adam headed to the subway to go back to his apartment to work on his script.

Tuesday Kurt went to his scheduled therapy session.

“Let’s start with this. What was the most surprising thing you wrote in your journal this week?”

“At first it was just a couple of words and I expanded it on it just a little because I haven’t been home much or had any free time since I wrote down yesterday when I was eating lunch with Adam.”

“Alright.”
He asked me about my holiday plans and something made me realize that I feel guilty in this really convoluted way about being the son that’s alive. When Finn and my dad first started spending time together, I was really jealous. They had so many overlapping interests and Finn was like a golden retriever that no one had ever played with. He took Finn to sporting events and stuff. I felt like Finn was the son my dad had always wanted. And that same feeling just washed over me when I was talking. I realized that I keep feeling like if I had been the one to die that nothing about my dad and Carole’s lives would have changed. I’m not saying that they wouldn’t have been sad because they would have because they do love me, but my dad knew I wouldn’t stay in Lima and I had already been living here for 7 months or so. Finn still lived with them. He worked at my dad’s shop. He was still there watching sports on TV with my dad. He lived with my dad for about 5 months without me right after they got married. They created rituals together. They bonded is the word people use, I guess. I eventually realized that my dad didn’t love me less because he had Finn around, but Finn did fill a void in my dad’s life that I couldn’t fill, but the opposite isn’t true. If I were the one that was gone, my dad’s life would have still be full because he would have had a companion for all of those things he loves and his wife would have been happy as well. It’s not like that now. Now, I’m feeling guilty about spending time with my own dad for Christmas, a holiday that means nothing to me in a religious sense. And Carole isn’t going to be there.”

“Why not?”

“She’s staying in Ohio with some of her family members. I’m not upset that she is, but all of them loved Finn and I am no Finn substitute. If I was gone and Finn was here, my dad would be going with Carole and Finn to her family’s celebrations. I would never be missed by the people who love Finn. I don’t have any extended family that cares to spend time with me. I’m really not trying to have a pity party, I promise. It’s just a really sobering thought to realize that my being alive still is tearing my family apart. My dad loves Carole and he should be with her. Christmas means a lot more to her than it does to me. It was my mom that loved Christmas. I’m not even sure I can explain myself. It’s a lot of jumbled, mixed up thoughts. And I’ve been having nightmares and flashbacks from being attacked last year at this time. Being out in the cold, dark evenings is putting me on edge. I think just the massive stress of finals, holidays, Finn being gone, the flashbacks, Blaine’s impending return to the City – it’s just a lot to try to try to straighten out in my mind.”

“How about we go back to something we talked about before for a few minutes? Have you been able to find an outlet for your need to nurture people without letting it overrun your life?”

“A little. It’s hard. Sebastian doesn’t want to be nurtured. He still resists. Sunday morning, I finally just asked him to let me make him breakfast without him feeling bad about it. Every time I do something nice for him, he seems to feel upset about it.”

“You said he’s had his own problems. So, maybe it makes him feel too vulnerable. Letting someone be nice to you without strings can be hard to accept. You’ve been there yourself.”

“I guess you have a point. I couldn’t accept it from Adam. I felt like it was a ploy to manipulate me somehow down the road since no one else had ever done things for me just because they wanted to.”

“Maybe you should try being a little more open with him about it. Asking him not to feel bad – I’m not sure that got your point across.”

“Maybe not. I think about it.”

They continued to talk until the session ended.
Friday morning when Sam’s alarm went off, Kurt sat up and waited for him to come out of the bathroom. “I want to be sure that you’re okay with me taking your truck to DC next week before I finalize my plans.”

“Yes. I’m fine with it. I really need to go see my family even though it’s just going to be for a few days. I haven’t seen them in about 4 months. Flying is much faster. And I got a good deal on the ticket.”

“I know. I understand. I just want to make sure.”

“I’m sure. I gotta run. I’ll see you later.”

“See ya.” Kurt lay back down, but couldn’t fall back asleep. Eventually he gave up and did his yoga workout and got dressed in sweats. He went out to the kitchen and made a pot of coffee and decided to make French toast for himself and for Sebastian. About 15 minutes later, Sebastian came out of his room.

“It smells good out here.”

“Good morning. I made you French toast.”

Kurt handed him the plate with the first pieces that were ready and dipped two more pieces of bread into the egg mixture for himself. Sebastian stood leaned back against the counter eating.

“This is good. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.” Kurt plated his own slices and grabbed a fork. He carried his plate to the table. “Juice?”

“Yes, please.”

Kurt poured two glasses and put them on the table and sat down. “So, I want to ask you something.”

He followed Kurt to the table and sat down. “What?”

“Would you like to come to Washington, DC next week with me for Christmas?”

Sebastian looked confused. “You’re not going to Ohio?”

“Not for Christmas. My parents sold the house in November. The new owners took possession December 1st. Right now, they are living in a one-bedroom apartment on a month-to-month lease. My dad’s in negotiation to sell the shop and to buy a different one near Wheeling, WV. It’s an hour drive to Zanesville, which is where quite a few of Carole’s relatives live.”

“That’s a big change.”

“It is. Carole hasn’t been coping well with being in Lima. I know that even seeing me is hard on her, even though she tries hard. Finn and I were nearly the same age and every time I’m around it’s just a reminder of Finn being gone. She apologized for not being there for me, but I understand that it’s just too hard. Everything that I do is just one more thing he’ll never do. When I graduate, when I get a job, if I get married, have kids, everything. I love her. I mean we hit it off from the beginning. When I think about it, it’s probably like you and Isabelle. Carole is like a really good aunt. She never tried to replace my mother, but she was always kind and sweet and helpful in whatever way she could be. But I only lived with her for about a year and a half. They’ve been
married a little over four years. She’s staying in Zanesville for the holidays I think. It’s my dad’s last week in DC.”

“I appreciate the offer and I’d definitely take you up on it, except that my grandparents sent me an email two days ago asking me to come to Paris for winter break. I haven’t seen them in three and a half years. Sam came home and found me upset Wednesday night when you were with Isabelle. I was going to wait and go after my birthday, but my grandmother really wants me to come now. I’m leaving tomorrow evening.”

“Oh. Well, I hope you have a great time. Three and a half years is a really long time.”

“Look, a lot of things are more complicated than I’ve explained. I haven’t lied to you, so don’t think that.” He took a deep breath. “The people I call my grandparents are actually my great grandparents. They’re my mom’s grandparents – her mom’s parents. Her parents died when she was a kid. Anyway, it’s a long story, but my grandparents are in their early 80s.”

“You were still thinking about what to have Sam paint for the other paintings. Maybe take some photos and have him paint something from Paris.”

“That’s a good idea. So, you’ll be in DC while Sam’s gone.”

“Most of the time.”

“I’m still up for baking tomorrow after Sam gets home if that’s still on the agenda.”

“Maybe some. I’ll think about it.”

“Sorry to spring this on you at the last minute. You basically weren’t home the last two days, at least not when I was here or awake.”

“It’s fine. I’d do exactly what you’re doing. Why wouldn’t your father give you the money to go visit your grandparents over last winter break or one summer?”

“The honest answer is that allowing me to leave the country after I turned 18 meant that he’d have no legal way to get me back here.”

“I see. You could have gotten a job.”

“Nope. Like I said, it’s all really complicated. I have no access to cash. I have several credit and debit cards for different purposes, but no ability to use them to withdraw cash. I’ve come up with ways to get small amounts of cash here and there by various means, but I could never come up with a way to get enough cash for a ticket to Paris. Sam actually paid for my ticket Wednesday night. I told him I’d pay him back when I get my trust fund this summer. My grandmère’s email was desperate. Something is wrong and as much as I didn’t want to say yes to Sam’s offer, I did.”

“He’s a sweetheart. You know that by now. If he offered, he was fine with it.”

“I’ve just tried not to think about any of it. Since it’s not something I can change yet, I’ve tried to let go of the anger about all of it and enjoy what I can of my life for now. After what happened with Dave, I looked at myself in the mirror and realized that I was becoming my father. Not in the same ways, but I was so caught up in my own anger that I was using people and hurting people. I wasn’t that person before I came to Ohio and I didn’t want to be that person anymore. So, I apologized, even if all of you thought I didn’t mean it. And I just left everyone alone and focused on putting one foot in front of the other.”
“Well, I’m glad you’re less angry or at least you’ve come up with less destructive ways to deal with it. I’m going to miss you. We’ve been here for about the same length of time you’re going to be gone.”

“I’ve gotten used to you two being around.”

“Used to us, huh? Such high praise.”

“You’re both actually good roommates.”

“I need to ask you something.”

“What?”

“Do you want us to move out at the end of the spring semester? Honestly, I’m figuring that Sam will leave when his job at Vogue ends. But I need to know if I need to find another place to live and how soon. I can move back into the dorm the last week in August, but if I need a place to stay over the summer, I’ll need to start asking around next semester to see if I can find someone to sublet from.”

“You can stay through the summer for certain. I’m still 90% certain I’m going to stay here for school next year. But I’ll be 100% certain of my choice when I get back. I’m going to go look into programs and universities while I’m there.”

“Thanks for letting me stay through the summer.”

“You’re welcome.”

“If you decide to go back, I could pay you rent for my room and you could rent your room to someone else. I could probably find someone. This is a really nice apartment. I couldn’t afford to pay you what it’s worth, but if someone else paid rent as well, at least we could cover the cost of the property taxes and building fees for the first year while you have more time to figure out what you want to do with the apartment.”

“I’ll add that to the possible contingencies.”

“I have one more thing to talk to you about. I talked to my counselor about something again. I think we’re still miscommunicating about some things. Initially, you thought I was being extra nice as a way to pay you back for letting us stay here. On the flip side, you were trying to prevent yourself from being anything but positive around me as some sort of penance for how you acted in high school. We moved past that for the most part, but I think you are a lot like me in that you don’t trust people who do things for you. You feel like there must be an ulterior motive, some type of manipulation or something that will lead you to be in the other person’s debt in the future. I struggle with that a lot. Adam can attest to that. I didn’t cope well with his constant kindness. It felt wrong. It felt like he’d want something in return at some point and I felt on edge because I didn’t know what it would be.”

“I can understand that. And I agree with you about us having that in common, but for different underlying reasons I think, but the outcome is the same. We don’t trust people to be genuinely nice to us. We’re always looking for the hidden agenda behind their behavior.”

“You keep telling me that I don’t need to make you breakfast or the other things I do for you.” Kurt took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “But you’re wrong. I do need to do them. Not because I want something from you in return, but because I need to have an outlet for my … nurturing, I guess is the word to use. I don’t know. Ever since my mom died, the role of homemaker fell to me.
My dad can’t cook anything. When she died, I took her place. I cooked, cleaned, did the laundry and all that kind of stuff for me and my dad. He worked and provided for us, but he was a busy man running his own shop. That role is so ingrained in who I am that I need an outlet for it. When I make you breakfast, it’s really just because I want to, not because I feel obligated. Making you something you enjoy actually makes me feel good. Doing the housework makes me feel like I’m contributing in some way, which makes me happy. I’m not trying to get on your good side or do those things as repayment for you letting me live here. I do them because I live here. I would still do those things for you and around the apartment even if I were paying $900 a month to live here, like I did in the loft. I do them because I’m me. But if it honestly bothers you that I cook for you sometimes or I just do all of the chores sometimes, please tell me so we can work it out. I can stop. We can make a detailed division of the chores if you want. I will stop cooking for you if it actually bothers you.”

Sebastian didn’t say anything at first. “I guess it makes me uncomfortable in the same way Adam’s behavior made you uncomfortable. No one has ever done things like that for me just because they wanted to. So, I don’t really know how to accept kindness extended to me without obligation. I guess I’ve never had that kind of friend before. The type that talks to me and learns about me and remembers my favorite type of cookies or whatever. I’ve certainly never had friends who would go out of their way to learn to make dishes I like or take the time to make my favorite cookies just for me. It may take time, but I’ll work on it, okay? I’ll talk to my own therapist about it. But we’re fine. I’m just going to accept you at your word and trust you, something that is new for me.”

“Good. Do you want to go with me to NYADA and dance? I’m going to head over there in a few minutes. It’s fine if you have other plans since it’s our first day of no schoolwork.”

“Actually that sounds fun. You won’t get in trouble for bringing me, right?”

“I don’t see why. The building is open over break, mornings only, so that students can still work out or practice for auditions and stuff. It will be fine. Fifteen minutes long enough?”

“Yeah.”

Kurt struggled to focus at first. Seeing Sebastian in a singlet and dance pants was slightly unnerving. He’d never seen him wearing so little.

“So, I’m probably no where close to the kind of shape I’d need to be in to do whatever it is you’re going to do, but I’m going to go for it anyway. I could use a challenge.”

Kurt moved to the bar and began to stretch. Every move he made, Sebastian did his best to mimic. Sebastian was surprised by his own flexibility since he didn’t have a barre to use at the apartment.

After about 10 minutes of warm-ups, Kurt said, “I think you’re in better shape than you let on.”

“I still dance at home, but we don’t have a barre, so it’s been a while. I guess what I’ve been doing has been working. I haven’t lost much of my flexibility.”

Kurt stepped away from the barre and stretched back into a back walkover.

“Yeah, no. That I can’t do. Maybe if there were mats and another person to spot me. I haven’t done any gymnastics in too long to be willing to try it on a hardwood floor.”

“There are mats in the stage combat practice room. You can try your skills there after we finish here if you want.”
“I’ll think about it.” He smirked. “Depends on whether I can still move when we finish here.”

Kurt sat on the floor and stretched a bit more and then started going through his ballet positions while doing pliés and relevés. After 30 minutes of ballet work, Kurt moved the barre back against the edge of the room.

“Are you allowed to tap in here?”

“I assume so, this is where my class meets next semester.”

Sebastian sat down and changed his shoes. “Your turn to imitate me.”

Kurt put his tap shoes on and walked around in them a bit and readjusted them a bit. “I’ve never taken any type of tap lessons, just so you know.”

“Got it. We need some music. Is there a dock I can use?”

Kurt pointed. Sebastian pulled a song up on YouTube and the music started to play. Sebastian began to dance. He was excellent. Kurt was majorly impressed and it turned out that Sebastian had a second unseen audience member. Miss July stepped into the studio and clapped when he finished.

“That was really good. Are you a new student for next semester? Do I get the pleasure of you being in my advanced tap class?”

“No, ma’am. I’m a friend of Kurt’s. I just came with him to dance for a while this morning. I haven’t tapped in ages.”

“Do you have a name besides friend of Kurt’s?”

“Sebastian Smythe.”

“Well Sebastian, that’s disappointing news. I need a TA for my intermediate tap class. Do you at least live in the City?”

“Yes. I’m a student at Columbia.”

“Don’t leave. I’m going to go get my tap shoes. I want to do that piece with you, if that’s okay.”

Cassie headed for her office

“Sure.”

“That was from The Artist, wasn’t it?” Kurt asked while Cassie was gone.

“Yeah.”

Cassie was back quickly wearing a skirt over her leotard and tights. She put her shoes on and started the music again. They danced through the whole song. They looked great together.

“That was amazing,” Kurt said.

“I’d never danced it with anyone, so that was definitely a lot of fun.”

“No partner?”

“I was at an all-boys boarding school when the movie came out. I learned it from watching the
movie. A lack of girls and being new to the area didn’t give me much of a chance to dance with a partner.”

“Well, you could get a long line of girls to agree to dance with you here. We always have a shortage of good tap dancers. Do you sing?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Hmm. And why are you at Columbia?”

“Family obligations.”

“I see. Well, if you decide you’re interested, let me know. I’m sure I can figure out a way for you to be in the advanced tap class at no cost and for you to get paid to be my TA for the intermediate course.” She handed him a piece of paper with her email address on it. “Look up when the classes meet and let me know.” She picked up her other shoes and strutted off.

“She’s… interesting.”

Kurt laughed. “Yeah. Interesting.” Kurt moved closer and spoke directly into Sebastian’s ear. “I’m pretty sure the walls here have ears. I’ll tell you more later.” He stepped back. “So, how about teaching me a few basic steps and I can break my shoes in a bit. And it will give me something to practice while you’re gone. Maybe I can get Sam to come with me a few times a week.”
Kurt stepped closer to Sam as they walked from the subway stop to the apartment. “That was really nice of you to loan Sebastian the money for the ticket to Paris.”

“It’s not a big deal. He didn’t say anything specific, but it felt like he thinks his grandfather is dying or something. And he hasn’t seen them in so long. It just seemed like the right thing to do.”

“Have you finished your Christmas shopping?”

“I have made up my mind on the gift. I’m buying a family membership to the children’s museum in Cincinnati. Stacey’s told me about it a few times when I’ve talked to her because her class went on a field trip there and she loved it. She wanted to go back, but my parents can’t really afford it. I thought it might be the last year that Stevie might really love it since he’s going to be in junior high in a year and a half. It’s hard to believe, but he’s going to be 11 soon.”

“Sounds like a great gift. You’re going with them while you’re there, right?”

“Yeah, that’s the plan.”

“It smells great in here. Mmm,” Kurt said, as he and Sam walked into the apartment.

“I started chili in the crock pot so it would be ready whenever you two got here.”

“Thanks,” Sam said.

They two of them hung their coats up and washed up. Sam helped by setting the table and Kurt served the chili. They sat down to eat together.

“Thanks for having dinner ready,” Kurt said.

“I thought we might watch the next Librarian movie after we eat.”

“Sounds good to me,” Sam said.

“But first, I thought we’d hang the paintings. I picked them up this afternoon. They’re in my room on my bed. They’re ready to hang. I bought screw anchors, screws, and a measuring tape. The frames are simple, but they look nice. They’re designed to hang flush to the wall to make them look more like windows.”

“That’s cool.”

Sebastian talked about the other pieces he wanted Sam to do for the apartment while they finished eating. Kurt and Sam did the clean up while Sebastian unwrapped the paintings and brought them into the living room. He propped one up on the back of the sofa and decided the height he wanted to hang them and began measuring the wall and each painting to make sure to get the location for the holes correct.

“Can I make a suggestion?” Kurt asked.

“Sure.”
“Let me make a template for each frame and you can use that to get the holes in the right place. We learned the hard way when we bought the new house and ended up looking some stuff up online after we messed up.”

“Whatever works to make sure the holes are right. I borrowed a drill from the maintenance office for the screw anchors. I don’t want to do it wrong. That’s for sure.”

Kurt dried his hands and left Sam to finish the dishes. After he changed into some casual clothes, he got out some paper he had left over from making patterns and showed Sebastian how to do it. After all four templates were finished, they pulled the sofa away from the wall, taped the templates up, marked the holes, and drilled them. They took the templates down, put the screw anchors and screws in, and then hung each painting.

“Well, that took longer than I had anticipated, but never having done it, I didn’t think about the complexity of getting four paintings to hang at the exact same height like four windows would,” Sebastian said.

Kurt wiped up the drywall dust and they pushed the sofa back into place. All three of them moved back near the door and looked at the final result.

“I think they look great,” Kurt said.

“I agree. It makes the room look complete now.”

“I’ll get started on the others once you send the photos you want me to use.”

Sebastian stood there looking still. “It really does make a difference in how the room feels. I never really thought about the empty walls, but now the rest look really empty.” He took his phone out of his pocket and took a picture. “Let’s watch the movie. I want to go ahead and pack tonight before I go to bed.” He moved a load of clothes to the dryer before heading to the sofa.

“Well, this has been fun, but I’m going to bed. 5:15 comes early. I would have never thought I’d work a job that started so early. I had to drag myself out of bed to get to school on time. Now, I leave for work an hour a half before I used to even wake up.”

“I’ll be in later. I’m going to go ahead and inventory the kitchen and decide what to bake tomorrow based on what we already have,” Kurt said.

After Sam had gone into the bedroom and closed the door, Sebastian went in the kitchen and hopped up on the counter to sit. “I have something to talk to you about. I don’t really know what to do. I don’t want to put you in the middle of a mess, but you’ve trusted me with personal stuff, so I’m going to try the whole ‘trust another person’ thing even though it hasn’t worked well for me in the past.”

“Let’s go sit back on the sofa.” Kurt left shopping list on the counter and walked back to the sofa.

Sebastian sat down. “Well, first off, I brought being punished for my behavior on myself initially. My father found out about the fake IDs and my trips to Scandals. He also found out about the slushie incident. I wasn’t expelled over it because it didn’t involve two Dalton students, but I was put on probation at the school. So, needless to say I didn’t endear myself to him. Let me back up a bit. When I first went to live with him, he gave me a car, a credit card with a monthly spending limit, and a prepaid gas card each month. My gasoline usage frequently exceeded my prepaid gas card value and I couldn’t use the credit card for gasoline because he obviously was the one to
receive the credit card statements. I came up with creative ways to get cash to put more gas in my
car and to be able to buy alcohol at the bars I went to, such as the kickback scheme from the fake
IDs. Anyway, long story short, I lost my car and most of my creative ways to get cash after my
father found out about the slushie incident, which was the Monday after Regionals. That’s why you
never saw me hanging around the Lima Bean anymore after that. I’m sure you were just glad to
have me gone and never even thought about why, which is fine. But that’s why. I didn’t have a car
to drive to Lima or anywhere anymore. I didn’t have anything to do with Hunter stealing the New
Directions’ Nationals Trophy that following fall. I didn’t interact with anyone from McKinley after
I apologized to you all in the Lima Bean that day right before Regionals. When I said I was done
being a jerk, I meant it. I did still manage to get small amounts of cash by offering to be the one to
pay for $40 in pizza by telling my dad that we’d alternate who paid because the pizza place
preferred one card when they delivered rather than paying the bill with several different cards.”

“Okay.”

“Anyway, what I’m going to ask you falls into a similar vein. I really need some cash for the trip to
see my grandparents. I don’t want my dad to know that I’ve gone to Paris if I can avoid it. So, I
was wondering if you would consider buying your groceries for the next four weeks using my card
and giving me $200 in cash. That way my father keeps seeing food purchases on the card he gets
statements for and I will hopefully have enough cash for the time period that I’m in France. I can’t
use my debit card there or he will definitely know where I am.”

“That’s fine. I’ll just need your pin number.”

“I don’t know it. You’ll just have to run the purchases as a credit transaction. If I knew the pin
number, I could use it as a debit card and take out extra cash and it wouldn’t show on the bank
statement.”

“I get it. That’s fine.”

“The other thing is that I have to email him every Monday evening at 10pm. I will write up the
emails for you to send and put them in the draft folder. You’ll just have to copy and paste them to a
new email and send them. I’ll need you to access my semester grades and add those week after
next.”

“This is getting really complicated.”

“I know. I’m sorry to ask so much. You can’t tell Isabelle that I’m gone. I can’t ask her to lie to my
father. You didn’t already tell her did you?”

“No.”

“Good.”

“Can I ask you something?”

“Sure.”

“Why can’t you work?”

“That’s part of the punishment. Because I was using a fake ID to get into bars and breaking the
law, my father determined that I was not mature enough to hold down a job and go to school. So, he
has my Social Security card, birth certificate, and US Passport in his safe. I get them back next
summer.”
“You know you can get a duplicate of your social security card for free. Birth certificates cost like $15 or something and I’m sure you can pay the fee to update your passport because you’re over 18 now and the one your father has would have been issued before you turned 18. How are you going to leave the country?”

“I still have my French Passport. I can’t get a job here with it, so he let me keep it.”

“I see.”

“And I didn’t know that I could get copies of those documents. I guess I never thought about it or looked into it because I’ve doing fine just using the card I have since I got here. I’ve just been careful with my spending. Plus, I’ve been trying to avoid angering him again. I had already straightened up after I apologized to you and the others, but after the steroid thing, I’ve just been doing my best to do exactly what he says.”

“So, you can’t take Miss July up on her TA position offer, then can you?”

“I actually called her and talked to her this afternoon. I really do miss dancing and those classes don’t conflict with my schedule for next semester, but I didn’t tell her that. I told her that I’m not going to be around over break and I wasn’t sure that I could make it work. She told me to meet her the Sunday before classes start.”

“She can be very persuasive. I’m sure she has ways of getting what she wants. She likes me, but dislikes both Rachel and Blaine. So, if she brings them up, there’s no need to hide your true feelings about either of them. She called Rachel ‘David Schwimmer’ or just ‘Schwimmer’."

“I don’t get it.”

“Look him up online.”

“What did she call Blaine?”

“Munchkin.”

“Oh, God. I bet he hated that.”

“More than any epithet that Santana ever gave him.”

“Wow. What does she call you?”

“Hummel at first. Mostly Kurt now. She’s brutal on the first year students, especially the ones who are full of themselves. But after living through Coach Sue’s insanity, Miss July’s antics didn’t faze me. Plus, I never thought I was a great dancer. Adequate, but I had no delusions that I’m the next Michael Flatley or Baryshnikov.”

“Should I be worried?”

“Nah. She liked you from the moment she saw you dance.”

Sebastian changed the subject back. “Will you help me?”

Kurt reached over and put his hand on top of Sebastian’s. “Yes, if that’s what you want to do. I think that you should consider being honest though. You’ve worked really hard to be the person you want to be. Lying to your father and sneaking out of the country could really backfire. Why don’t you think about it tonight? Tomorrow morning, you can let me know what you decide. If you
decide you want to tell him what’s going on, I’ll sit with you while you call him. We can even get
Isabelle over here if you want.” He squeezed Sebastian’s hand and stood up. “You can let me
know what you’ve decided in the morning.” He looked Sebastian in the eyes. “I know you hate
him or at least seriously dislike him. I just want you to make a choice you can live with. I’m your
friend. I’ll help you if you want me to.”

Sebastian stood up.

“Do you want a hug?”

“Actually, yeah.”

Kurt stepped closer and pulled Sebastian into a hug.

After Sam left Saturday morning, Kurt did his yoga workout. When he finished, he browsed
through the free books on Amazon to see if anything caught his eye. He was so used to having a lot
of schoolwork to do that two days into break he was already feeling like he had too much extra
time on his hands. What else was there to do at 6:00 in the morning when it was freezing cold and
dark outside still? He didn’t find anything that grabbed his attention. He switched to YouTube and
looked up the videos he had saved. He clicked on the channel and watched another one from the
same psychologist whose videos had been helpful. About a half-hour later, he went out to the
kitchen to work on the inventory and shopping list that he hadn’t finished the night before.

Once he heard Sebastian’s shower turn off, he made them both breakfast. Sebastian came out of his
room about 15 minutes later. He didn’t say anything. He sat down at his spot and picked up his
fork and started to eat.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

Sebastian didn’t say anything else until he had finished eating. “I thought about what you said.” He
sighed. “You’re right that I don’t want to be that person. And I texted Isabelle and asked her to
come over. She’ll be here at 8:30.”

“Okay. I’ll go get ready so we can go to Costco after she leaves. I know you don’t need any food,
but I was hoping you’d still come with me.”

“Sure.”

At 8:35, there was a knock at the door. Kurt let Isabelle in.

“Good morning, Kurt.”

“Good morning. Would you like some coffee?” He reached out and took her coat and hung it in the

closet.

“I already had some, but thank you for the offer.”

Sebastian came out of his room. Isabelle walked straight over to him and pulled him into a hug.
“Oh, honey. Let’s do this. Your dad’s an ass, but he’s not completely heartless.”
“Says you.”

“Where do you want to do this?”

“At the table, I guess.” He pulled his phone out of his pocket, pulled the middle chair out, and sat down.

Kurt and Isabelle flanked him and sat down as well.

Sebastian pressed the button to dial his father and put the phone on speaker. “Sebastian? Why are you calling me on a Saturday morning, especially so early?”

“Grandpère is sick and isn’t going to live much longer. I need to go to Paris.”

“You have school.”

“Not until after winter break. I will come back before school starts again. I’m not asking you for the money. I just don’t want to break your trust again. I’ve done as you’ve asked and followed the rules you laid down for the last 2½ years. No bars, no parties, no job. I’ve made straight A’s during that whole time. You’ve seen that I’ve budgeted. I’ve done everything you’ve asked. I’m going to be gone for about four weeks. I can still send you my grade report from this semester once I can access it in a week or so. I already sent you my schedule for next semester.”

“You’re not going to stay in Paris, are you?”

“No, sir. I’ll be back. I would like to be able to withdraw some cash this afternoon so that I can take use the transit system and buy food while I’m there. I can forward you Grandmère’s email and you can put it through Google translate if you want. I’m not sure what else to say. I’m not running off for a holiday. Grandpère has cancer and it’s spread to his liver. He has a few weeks at most. I haven’t seen him in 3½ years.”

“Alright, Sebastian. How did you get the money to buy a ticket?”

“I borrowed it from someone I know. I have to repay him. He knows it won’t be until July.”

“I see. I will allow you to go to the bank and withdraw $200 in cash to use while you’re gone for whatever you need it for. But I expect to not see any grocery store expenses on your statement this month.”

“Yes, Father.”

“If you have some kind of emergency, you may use your card while you’re there. Otherwise, no purchases.”

“I understand, sir.”

“The original paintings you commissioned make a lovely addition to the apartment.”

“I agree. I have already discussed the possibility of commissioning some smaller pieces for the other rooms.”

“Very well. You know how much you have left to spend.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Was there something else you needed to tell me?”
“No, Father.”

“Give me an hour to authorize the cash withdrawal and then you can go to the bank after that.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Please forward your grade report to me once it’s available.”

“I will, sir.”

“Goodbye, Sebastian.”

“Goodbye.” Sebastian double-checked that he had ended the call.

“Pompous much?”

“I told you. It actually went much better than I had anticipated.”

“He didn’t even say anything about your grandpère. Or wish you happy holidays or anything.”

“I didn’t expect him to. I actually figured he’d reject my request for cash.”

“Maybe he figured you’d just borrow more money. It’s not like he gave you any extra. He’s just allowing you to withdraw this month’s grocery money in cash.”

Isabelle asked, “Why didn’t you ask me for the money, honey? You know I would have just given it to you.”

“I know. At the time, I was really upset and I just wanted to get to Paris to see my grandparents. Honestly, at that moment I was not planning to tell Father that I was going and I didn’t want to put you in the position of possibly lying for me.”

“I can still give you the money and you can go ahead and repay whoever you borrowed it from. That way it’s not hanging between you and whoever it is.”

“It was Sam. He came home Wednesday evening and found me crying after I read my emails.”

“I’m surprised Sam had enough money to even loan you that much,” Kurt said.

“I actually didn’t even think about it. I was so upset that when he offered, I just agreed because I wanted to go so badly.”

“It’s okay, honey. I’ll give you the money and you can pay Sam back this afternoon.”

Kurt asked, “We’re going to Costco. Want to come with us?”

“Why not? I haven’t done anything so absolutely normal as grocery shopping in who knows how long. It will be an adventure. I even came wearing boots.”

“The new practical, yet stylish Louboutins, with a mere 3-inch chunky heel.”

“But they do have hiking boot traction on the bottom.”

“Of course.” Sebastian laughed.

“We’re baking this afternoon, if you want to join us – us being the two of us plus Sam and Adam.”
“That would be a disaster of epic proportions.”

“You could socialize while we bake.”

“Now, that’s more like it. Throw in Indian food for lunch and some wine and I’m in.”

“Done. We’re taking Sam’s truck, so we can just order when we leave Costco and pick it up on the way back.”

They got up from the table. They had been sitting facing the closet, so Isabelle hadn’t actually seen the paintings yet.

“Are those the paintings you just mentioned on the phone?”

“They are.”

“They’re lovely. They make the space feel warmer.”

“They do. I’m going to buy some more.”

She moved closer to the paintings to have a better look. “Who painted them? I don’t see a signature.”

“He signed the backs.”

“He who?”

“Sam.”

“Wait. Sam painted these?”

“He did.”

“I did not know that he can paint. He’s very good.”

Kurt agreed, “He is. If we’re going to talk about it, let’s do it while I drive to Costco. It’s the Saturday before Christmas. It’s going to get crowded there by lunchtime.”

They grabbed their coats and headed out.

When they got back, Kurt put the groceries away while Isabelle and Sebastian talked and he finished packing. Sam and Adam showed up at the same time.

“Oh, wow, it smells good in here, but not like cookies,” Sam said. He hung his coat up and took Adam’s and put it in the closet as well.

Kurt said, “That would be because the lovely Isabelle bought all of us Indian food for lunch. It’s all on the table waiting.”

“We’re not quite up to kiki level, but still…”

Adam looked confused.

Kurt laughed. “Come on sit down. I’ll let Isabelle tell the story.”
They listened to Isabelle and Kurt tell the story as they passed the containers around. They spent quite a while eating and talking. Once everyone had eaten their fill, Sam started picking up the cartons and putting them in the fridge. Kurt collected their plates and loaded the dishwasher. Sebastian started pulling out baking supplies.

“So, what are you all making?”

“Well, a few types of cookies and a cheesecake. Half the cheesecake is for today and the other half we’ll freeze until New Year’s. Oh, and a pan of brownies.”

“I’m putting the cheesecake in first since it needs to chill before we eat it and it takes an hour to bake. I bought an extra cookie sheet at Costco this morning, so everyone can prepare their own trays of cookies.” Kurt pulled three cookie sheets and distributed them. He stood on the opposite side of the kitchen from everyone else and got the cheesecake ready to go in the oven quickly.

The others were busy talking to each other and to Isabelle, so they weren’t making a lot of progress, but no one seemed to mind. Once the cheesecake was in, Kurt turned his attention to making the brownie batter. Once he finished he pulled another chair from the table and put it next to the one Isabelle was sitting in. He plopped down in the chair. They both sat facing the other three. The half-wall blocked their view of the countertop, but they could easily talk to them while they prepped their cookies.

“I’m envisioning a photo shoot I need to arrange in May or so. Hot men baking for the Holidays. The four of you have to go shirtless though and just wear 50’s-inspired aprons that tie around the waist.”

Kurt laughed. “How about I get to choose the clothes and we just photograph the three of them? I’d need way too many post-photo shoot touch-ups, and I’d definitely throw the color balance off by blinding the camera crew with my pasty white skin.”

Sam hated it when Kurt talked badly about himself, which could clearly be seen in the scowl on his face. “Kurt, stop.”

“Four’s a crowd in a photo like this anyway,” he said. “Three looks right.”

“Christmas Cuties in the Kitchen,” Isabelle said.

“I’ll call Marc Jacobs on Monday and tell him he needs to get some men’s aprons ready in the next couple of months. We’ll see how long it takes for someone from his office to call back asking if you’ve had too much eggnog.”

Isabelle laughed. “Sam?”

He looked up. “Yeah?”

“I like the paintings a lot.”

“Oh. Thanks.”

“I didn’t know you painted.”

“Yeah, art classes, music classes at my first high school, and PE kept my GPA up high enough that I could play sports.”

Isabelle didn’t know how to respond.
“I have dyslexia – bad. Like I can’t spell to save my life. New topic. Music. Someone should start singing so we can all join in.”

Kurt started to sing.

*You know Dasher and Dancer…*

It turned into a trio. Adam and Sebastian did not know the words. When they finished, Sam started singing.

*Grandma got run over by a reindeer…*

He sang the whole thing by himself.

Sam said, “It’s Sebastian’s turn. Sing us a French Christmas song.”

*Un flambeau Jeannette Isabelle, un flambeau courons au berceau…*

“That was beautiful,” Kurt said.

Sebastian smiled.

“Now, Adam’s turn,” Kurt said.

“Well, in churches they sing a lot of the same ones that I’ve heard here.” He paused and thought for a minute. “There’s one that comes to mind that I’ve never heard sung here. He started to sing.”

*Once in David’s royal city…*

“That was really nice. I’ve never heard that one,” Kurt said.

“Me neither,” said Sam.

The caroling and baking continued for quite some time.

Kurt had bought a few inexpensive storage containers that morning as well. They packed up cookies for the security staff and for Adam to take home with him since he was attending a Christmas get together with other Juilliard students early the next week. Kurt froze half the cheesecake and half of the brownies and served the other half.

By the time 5:00 rolled around Isabelle needed to leave. She offered to have her driver drop Adam off on the way to her place, which he accepted. Kurt walked them down to the lobby.

Kurt hugged Isabelle, “Thank you for everything.”

“I had fun. You four are a definitely a lot of fun.” She stepped into the entryway.

Adam stepped forward and Kurt hugged him as well. “Thanks for coming.”

“It was great. Happy Christmas, Kurt.”

Kurt waved as the car drove off. He had placed the container he brought down with him on the security desk when he was hugging them goodbye. When he walked back inside, he stopped.

“These are for the security stuff. We baked them fresh this afternoon. Happy holidays.”
“Thanks, Mr. Hummel. I’m sure we’ll all enjoy them. Not many people bake from scratch anymore.”

Kurt smiled and nodded. As he walked across the lobby to the elevator, he heard the container being opened already.

While Kurt was downstairs, Sebastian went in his room and got the envelope of cash Isabelle had withdrawn and given to him to repay Sam with.

“Hey, Sam?” Sebastian said standing in the bedroom doorway.

“Yeah?”

“Can you come out to the living room?”

“Sure.” Sam followed him and sat down on the sofa.

“Isabelle is just giving me the money for the ticket to Paris, so I want to go ahead and repay you. I can’t thank you enough for being willing to loan me the money. I panicked Wednesday night and you were there for me. I appreciate that, more than I can say.”

“No problem. Really. I was just glad I had enough to cover it so you could get the ticket. Are you ready to go when Kurt gets back up?”

“Yeah, I think so. I’m going to go double-check right now. I’m only taking a week’s worth of clothes and a suit and my dress shoes. I’ll just do laundry when I’m there. I can’t take a second suitcase. The airline I’m flying on charges a baggage fee and has weight restrictions on the first suitcase. Thanks for driving me out to the airport.”

“It’s not a big deal. Go check your stuff. It can’t take Kurt that much longer to be back up and you’re supposed to be there at 7:00, right?”

“I am.”

Just then Kurt turned the key in the lock and opened the door. “Ready?”

“Just about.”

They all three bundled up, and Sebastian grabbed his suitcase and backpack.

Forty minutes later, Sam pulled up to the passenger drop-off at La Guardia. They all three got out. Sam opened the cover and pulled Sebastian’s suitcase out of the back.

“Is it okay if I hug you?” Kurt asked.

“Yeah.” He stepped into Kurt’s arms.

“I’m glad you’re getting to go. I’m sad about why, but … I’ll miss you.” Kurt hugged him tight and stepped back.

Sebastian took his suitcase and pulled Sam into a quick hug. “I’ll see you both when I get back.”
“We’ll be here to pick you up,” Kurt said as he waved.

He and Sam got back in the truck and drove back to the apartment in silence.

Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday went by quickly. This time it was just Kurt and Sam heading to the airport. They said their goodbyes and Kurt drove back to his apartment. The closer he got, the more apprehensive he felt. He hadn’t considered that he’d be alone in the parking garage in the dark.

He pulled in and stopped in the loading zone in the parking garage and went inside to the security desk.

“I’m really sorry to bother you, but could one of you come with me to park our truck? I hate to be a bother.”

“No problem, Mr. Hummel. That’s what we get paid to do.” He followed Kurt out and got in the passenger side. He walked with Kurt back to the building.

“Thank you. I appreciate that more than I can say.”

“No problem. Those were some mighty fine cookies you left for us. Thanks for those.”

“You’re welcome. I’m glad you enjoyed them.”

Kurt got in the elevator and went up to his apartment, still on edge, but he felt better once he was inside the apartment. He decided to shower early and watch one of Sebastian’s DVDs before going to bed early so he would be rested for his four-hour drive to DC the next morning.

Kurt slept in until 6:00 Christmas Eve morning. When he got up, he looked outside and it was snowing quite hard and there was already an accumulation of about 5cm. He checked the weather and what was supposed to have been a minute amount of snowfall had morphed into an accumulation prediction of 15cm. He put off leaving for DC for two hours so he could assess the situation and call and talk to Burt about it.

After waiting two hours, the snowfall had just increased another 2.5cm. He checked the radar and the forecast and it hadn’t improved.

“Dad?”

Burt answered with a gravelly voice, “Yeah, Kurt?”

“Sorry to wake you up. It’s snowing a lot here and it’s not looking good for me to head out. I don’t think it’s a good idea for me to drive four hours in a snow storm.”

“No, definitely not. You stay put and we’ll see how things look tomorrow. I’ll miss you, but I’d rather you be safe.”

“Why don’t you see if you can get a flight out still? Go spend Christmas Eve and Christmas Day with Carole.”

“Are you sure, kiddo?”

“Yeah. I’m fine. I just don’t want to drive a lightweight truck in the snow for four hours. I don’t
have any sandbags or anything to weigh the back down.”

“Yeah, I know. I’ll call you later after I figure some stuff out.”

“Okay. I love you.”

“Love you too, bud.”

Kurt stood staring out the window at the falling snow for a while before he lay back down to relax for a while.

About an hour later, Kurt’s cell phone rang, making him jump because he was using his phone to check the weather and radar yet again.

“Hello?”

“Mr. Hummel, this is the security office downstairs. About 30 minutes ago, there was a young lady and a guy about your age here to see you. We never give out any personal information and we do not confirm resident’s names. So, no information about you living here was given out, but we wanted to double-check that you weren’t expecting someone. We’d hate to turn out family members on a holiday.”

“No, no one is planning to come see me that I know of. Can I see the video security feed so I can see who it was? If it someone I want to see, I can text them to come back and I can sign them in.”

“Sure. I’ll use my phone and just take a photo of the image and I’ll meet you at the stairs on the first floor. That way if they come back, they won’t see you in the lobby from the entry way.”

“I’ll be right down.” Kurt took the elevator to the first floor and walked over to the stairwell.

The guard was waiting for him. He stepped close enough to Kurt to show him the photo. “It’s not a great photo, but I think it’s good enough.” He turned the photo so Kurt could see it.

“Oh, my God. That’s Rachel and Blaine. Do not under any circumstances let them in this building. Please.”

“If you can provide good photos of them, we can add them to your ‘Never allowed’ list.”

“I’ll get photos as soon as possible. Thank you for showing me.”

“You’re welcome, Mr. Hummel.” The security guard quickly descended the stairs back to the main level.

Kurt got on the elevator and rode back up to the apartment. How did they know where I live? He tried to push those thoughts away and focus on the fact that they wouldn’t be able to get into the building. As soon as the elevator door opened, he walked quickly to the apartment door and let himself inside. He quickly closed and locked the door behind him.

Why am I panicking? This is ridiculous. It’s not like their serial killers. Get a grip! The worst thing they’ll do is talk to me endlessly about my terrible life choices.

Kurt resigned himself to four very long days of Sam being gone. He connected his phone to his
speaker and chose a random Amazon music station to listen to. It wasn’t enough to keep his mind from wandering. He turned it off and opened his laptop.

Once it was ready, he searched to for information about the Sectionals that New Directions, Dalton, and Vocal Adrenaline had competed in. He found that there was no mention of New Directions and that the third place spot went to the Falconeers, a group that Kurt had never heard of. The Warblers came in second, and Vocal Adrenaline had won.

Next he navigated to Facebook. He didn’t sign in. He looked at Rachel’s page. She still had quite a bit of her page set to public. He found that she had been offered and accepted the lead role in a new Broadway musical *A Summer of Love* and that Jesse St. James was cast opposite her. That explained Rachel being back in the City. He wondered how she had managed to be cast in a lead role again so soon after bailing on *Funny Girl*. But Rachel had somehow always managed to be the star, but it still didn’t make sense to Kurt.

He knew that all of the videos he had watched warned about the risks of reengaging with a narcissist, even by privately checking up on them through social media, but he couldn’t resist the urge. He typed Blaine’s name into the search bar, and then clicked enter. He scrolled down the page until he got close to the date of Sectionals.

There was a post congratulating the Warblers for a job well done for their performance at Sectionals, with a link to YouTube. Kurt resisted the urge to click the link. The next time Blaine posted was a “sincere and heartfelt thank you” for the opportunity to work with the Warblers, letting everyone know of his eminent departure to New York.

He scrolled back farther to his posts before Sectionals – to the week after the wedding. There were no posts, as if he had been offline. Then, he saw it. That following weekend. A post requesting that people give them space. A vague mention of difficult courses and the need to do well. Blaine seemed to be acting like they were still together.

He scrolled back up again and reread the first post about New York. Oh. “We’re excited about being back in the Big Apple soon. Got a great place, closer to classes. Can’t wait to be at NYU.”

The next post said, “Finally here. The place is great. We love it. Love having Rachel here too. She’s going to rock Summer of Love. NYADA was great, but NYU looks like the place for me. Toured the music department today.”

“So, that’s how he’s playing it?” Kurt said out loud. “I guess he twisted the whole situation to look like I couldn’t handle the pressure and went into hiding to keep from flunking out.”

He continued to read all of the posts on Blaine’s wall from that point to the most recent post. “Found my new favorite coffee shop. Goodbye Lima Bean, hello Copper Cup.”

He had attended the Drama Department’s plays and had gone skating at Rockefeller Center. Obviously, he’d done a good job of disguising himself. But with his crazy curls and easily grown full beard, all it would take would be a bad boy outfit of some sort and he’d be virtually unrecognizable to most people.

Kurt talked to the air. “So, he’s playing it up like we came back here together without specifically saying so. He’s been tailing me. He’s been to the coffee shop where Sam works. And he knows where I live.” Kurt pushed his laptop to the side enough that he could cross his arms on the desk and then he put his head down.

After a few minutes, he sat back up, pulled the laptop back to where he could reach it, and loaded
the online version of the Lima newspaper. It only took a couple of minutes to remember how lame it was. He typed “McKinley High School Lima Ohio” into Google.

Just reading the headlines of the first several hits was wild. “McKinley High School in Violation of Ohio Athletics Code.” “FBI Involved in Storage Locker Investigation.” “Principal of Ohio High School Detained Without Bail.” “Northeastern Ohio High School Students Split in Massive Mid-Year Redistricting.” “William McKinley High School Board Indicted.”

“What on earth happened in Lima?” Kurt picked up his phone and called Burt back.

“Hey, kiddo. No luck on the flights out this morning. They’re all booked. But I got one for late this evening.”

“Is the internet still on in your apartment?”

“Yeah.”

“Get on Skype. I want to talk for a while and at least that way I can see you since we can’t get together in person.”

“Yeah. I’ll do that. Give me a few minutes to get it out and get comfortable somewhere.”

“Just call when you’re ready.”

Kurt took his laptop and the cord to the living room and plugged it in. He grabbed a glass of water, stretched out and got comfortable on the sofa, and waited for Burt to call.

“Alright, kiddo. What’s up?”

Kurt stared at the screen. “Tell me what happened in Lima.”

Burt looked confused. “Oh, you mean the school?”

“Yeah. I saw insane headlines, but I didn’t read the articles yet.”

“Well, let’s see. I didn’t find out until Carole and I went back to Lima after you and Sam headed to New York. When we got back in town, boy were things a mess. While you were in DC with us, I neglected to keep up on the local issues. My own doing – don’t feel guilty. I wanted to enjoy whatever small amount of time I had with you.”

“I appreciate that.”

“So, Becky turned Sue in for what she saw in a storage locker. That has been kept pretty hush-hush because the FBI is involved. The superintendent was brought up on several charges – misuse of school resources, misuse of power, other stuff. The school board has been indicted on a long list of charges. Sue’s in jail. The school’s been closed. The city held an emergency redistricting meeting and the students have all been sent to other schools for the rest of the school year – North Lima, Thurston, and even some out to Findlay. McKinley will reopen next fall with a completely new staff.”

“Wow.”

“Schuester put their place up for sale and moved to Akron. The drive was ridiculous. The school board’s list of indictments continues to grow as the minutes from their meetings are being
reviewed.”

“Like what?”

“Failure to follow district policies. Some of the charges go way back, like that Karofsky kid’s expulsion being overturned. And stuff way before that.”

“I see.”

“The school violated No Child Left Behind and didn’t provide the basics to comply with other state and federal laws. Teacher licensing issues. Misallocation of funds. Like I said, the list keeps growing as the investigation continues.”

“That’s wild. I’m sure the list is long.”

“It’s a big mess. On the upside, I was going to tell you when you came today that I’ve sold the shop. Cassius got a business partner to invest with him and he’s buying the shop. He’s not going to let anyone go.”

“That’s perfect. Really.”

“It is. And I’m signing all of the final paperwork on that shop outside of Wheeling after New Year’s. I needed to get the funds from selling before I could finalize the purchase of the new place.”

Kurt didn’t say anything.

“I know you’re sad, bud. I am too. Hummel Tires and Lube was my dad’s place. But times change and situations change and I’m renaming the new place. The current owner is retiring and I’m keeping his staff and he’s really glad that I am. His shop was his dad’s as well. But his daughter and his granddaughter don’t have any interest in running a shop. So, I think it’s a good fit.”

“How’s Carole doing?”

“Up and down. She was really happy when you and Sam were here, but after you left, the loneliness hit again. Thanksgiving with no one to cook for but the two of us in the big house in Lima – she slid back downhill after that. I’m hoping that spending time with her family in Zanesville is helping. What prompted you looking stuff up about Lima?”

“Blaine and Rachel showed up here this morning.”

“What? I thought the building was secure.”

“It is. Security didn’t let them in. But after they were gone, the security office called me and I went down to see who had been here and he showed me a photo. So, I went on Facebook to see why Rachel might be here. She got the lead in a new Broadway musical.”

“After she flaked out with the first one and her TV show bombed?”

“Yep. And she’s moved in with Blaine. He’s gone to at least one event I went to and was some place else at the same time I was, which probably happened from him following me there from the first event.”

“So, he’s stalking you.”

“How else did he figure out where I live? Unless you or Carole gave him my address, there’s no
way he could have known without following me here at some point. And he’s been to the coffee shop where Sam works.”

“I had hoped you were wrong about him. I hoped he’d just mind his own business and leave you alone.”

“It seems to me that he’s pretending that we’re still together. I’ve not been in contact with anyone besides Mercedes and she’s not talking to the rest of them. I guess we’ll see when he finally corners me somewhere.”

“You don’t think he’ll hurt you, do you?”

“Physically, no. But whatever he says will hurt because he hasn’t respected my wishes to be left alone.”

“So, you think he’ll keep trying.”

“He’ll be very patiently insistent.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means that I expect him to offer to give me space and time to return to our relationship, but that he will be insistently friendly when I don’t want to be his friend. Running into me places and just saying hi and then going on his way. Attending events and waving from across the room, while showing off his mega watt smile. That may be all he does for months. Just slowly blending into my life.”

“That sounds really creepy.”

“It feels really creepy. Knowing that he was at that NYADA event and then he followed us to the skating rink makes me feel creeped out. Knowing that he’s been frequenting the coffee shop that Sam works at is creepy. It’s just down the street.”

“And there’s nothing that can be done about those things of course because he’s not directly bothering you or even interacting with you.”

“Right. I need a new topic. How about you show me the pictures of the house you put an offer on and the new shop?”

Kurt spent the rest of the day and the next three days in the apartment. He spent his time studying videos and analyzing himself and his relationship with Blaine. He found that in the process, he spent a lot of time analyzing his relationship with Rachel as well. He made lists and charts. He analyzed the things he had written in the notebook he had been using too.

He had a lot to work through. Some of the issues were easy to identify. Low self-esteem from years of verbal bullying and feeling like he was so different from all of the other guys he grew up with. But then the recognition of the fact that he had accentuated those differences and exacerbated the tension between himself and his peers came in to play as well.

He didn’t want to be like everyone else because he didn’t like the other guys his age. He hated their attitudes and how they behaved. But pointing out how everyone was inferior didn’t actually help. By dressing so ridiculously outlandishly, he made it impossible for a lot of people to see him as anything but a 2-dimensional stereotype. He hated everything his peers loved, oftentimes just on
principal and not for any real reason.

Sam had taught him to play videogames and he actually liked it. But no one knew. He had to keep up that façade that being a boorish jock was too far down the evolutionary scale for him to bother with them. He had had excluded people from potential friendship by discriminating against jocks just as much as most of the jocks wouldn’t consider befriending him.

But what about someone like Mike? Mike was never a brute. Matt had left after the first year, but he had never done anything to Kurt personally. Yet, Kurt had never spoken a word to him. Maybe the two of them would have been like Sam and treated him as an equal who had different interests, but who would have been willing to participate in things they all enjoyed.

How many times had he stood in the hall and publicly primped? How many people’s clothing did he insult when he had no idea if the person could afford to wear anything else? For all his claims of being excluded, he had been exclusionary as well. His high school retort of “one day you will all work for me” played back in his mind.

What David did in the locker room was assault, but wasn’t what Blaine did in the backseat of his car worse? When he pushed Dave back, he backed off and walked away immediately. He had repeatedly pushed Blaine’s hands away and even practically yelled ‘no’ and ‘stop’ to no avail. But he thought David hated him and that Blaine loved him. And the first thing Kurt did with Dave’s secret was to tell Blaine, who then offered to help him, making everything 100 times worse.

And now Blaine had broken Dave’s heart. And given everything he had learned, he couldn’t move past wondering if Blaine had chosen Dave specifically. Dave told him that the first night they ran into each other that he had talked about the Valentine’s Day secret admirer gifts. Did Blaine have a flash of how he could use Dave to make Kurt look bad? Was it to show Kurt that the fact that they couldn’t live together was all on Kurt? Was he thinking of a two-for-one deal? Did he realize that he could humiliate Kurt and make everyone think that their break up was because Kurt was as insufferable as Santana’s rant had said he was by showing that he could live successfully with Dave, the formerly impossible to get along with bully? Did he think about how he could hurt Dave for wooing Kurt in a way that Kurt loved? Kurt had gushed to Blaine about the gifts because he had truly believed that they were from Blaine. Kurt had never told Blaine that he had found out who the gifts were from. When Blaine realized that they were from Dave, did he decide that revenge was a good idea? Or did he think that he could get that type of devotion from Dave directed towards him?

More questions than answers – that’s how his four days went. Asking himself endless questions about his behavior and actions and beliefs. He had written pages and pages of things in his notebook and in the end, he still found that he came up short on the answers to the questions of who he was and what his goals were, other than to finish college.

On Sunday, Kurt left at 4:00 to do their weekly shopping at Costco. He had made due with what he had, even though he had not planned on being home for half the week. Sam had left him cash to do his shopping for him. He pushed his cart through the store, sampling everything that was being offered. He double-checked his list before he got in line. Once he had loaded everything into the back of the truck, he headed for the airport.

Sam texted him when he came outside. Kurt opened the truck door and waved so that Sam could find him. He got in and put his backpack on his lap and Kurt pulled away.

Kurt asked, “How was your trip?”
“Short, but fun. We all had fun at the museum. We cooked and ate and played games and watched a couple of movies. They’re going to Tennessee for New Years. My mom and dad both managed to get the 2nd off, so they’ll have four days there.”

“I’m sure they’ll enjoy that.”

“How was DC?”

“I didn’t go.”

“Why?”

“We got a lot of snow Christmas Eve morning and the weather just didn’t let up until Friday. It was just windy and snowy and I decided I didn’t want to drive that much in a lightweight truck. I told my dad to go ahead to Ohio when I bailed Christmas Eve morning. He got a flight out late that evening.”

“So, you’ve been alone the last four days?”

“Yeah. I spent it soul searching.”

“Oh…”

“And researching the insanity in Lima, more specifically McKinley.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Kurt filled him in on all of the craziness.

Sam just sat there for a few minutes before he said, “Is this some kind of weird ‘I got so bored I wrote a crazy story about the town I grew up in that I hate?’”

“Not at all. When we get back I’ll show you if you want.”

“Sure, I guess. It sounds insane.”

“And last, but not least, Rachel and Blaine stopped by the apartment building Christmas Eve morning.”

“What? I feel like you are just trying to rile me up because you’ve been alone for four days.”

“Nope. Not at all. Security didn’t let them in or acknowledge that I live there, but since Blaine’s new favorite coffee shop is the Copper Cup, I know he knows that he was in the right place. He just found out that he can’t get in the building. That won’t prevent him from waiting outside.”

“I haven’t seen him.”

“I’m not sure that you would recognize him with his hair curly and a full beard wearing goth clothes or something. He can look completely different than you’re used to. That clean-shaven, dapper look doesn’t even remotely resemble what he looks like with a beard and his curls loose. When we get back, you can read his Facebook posts yourself.”

“So, Rachel’s here too.”

“Living with him, it seems. She got the lead in a new Broadway musical with Jesse St. James?”
“I feel like maybe I fell asleep on the plane and I’m having an oxygen-deprivation-induced dream.”

“Unfortunately not.”

“This is all too weird. When we get back, I’ll put the groceries away while you read the articles to me.”

“The only thing weirder than living through the insanity is listening to you read about in the news,” Sam said. “Anyway, now that you’ve read it all to me while I put the groceries away and made dinner, let’s eat and NOT talk about it. The two of them are here and that’s that. The only thing we can do is attempt to avoid engaging with them. Or we can make one valiant attempt to make them understand that we are not interested in interacting with them at all.”

“I’ll think about it. After we eat and clean up, let’s play card games or something interactive. Watching movies or listening to music isn’t enough to keep me distracted.”

“Sure.”

Sam got up and left for work at his usual time each morning the next week. Kurt opted to stay home to work out and practice his ballet and modern dance, leaving out the jumps so he didn’t annoy the neighbors below.

He made lunch each day and they ate together before they left for Vogue. Kurt felt like he was under surveillance, but he decided to put forth his best acting skills and pretend like he felt carefree.

Each evening, they ate dinner together and picked movies to watch on Netflix.

Wednesday, they let Isabelle dress them from the Vault and they attended the Vogue New Year’s Eve party, which gave them a fantastic view of the ball dropping in Times Square without dealing with the freezing cold weather or the crowds.

It was a fairly laid-back party with a band and an open mic and a karaoke machine. After a couple of glasses of champagne, Kurt had loosened up enough to give into Isabelle’s nagging and he got up and sang. Sam sang a couple of songs as well. Several of the other employees were decent singers. A couple of were awful, but they were too inebriated to care about how they sounded because they were having too much fun. Kurt managed to get Isabelle to sing with him once.

Sam still had to work New Year’s Day morning. He ended up taking a 3-hour nap, working, and coming back home dead on his feet and taking another 3-hour nap.

Saturday and Sunday, Sam was gone until nearly 6:30 in the evening because he had to work a second 6-hour shift both days in trade for two of the days he was off the previous week.

The third week of Kurt’s winter break started was the first week of Sam working full-time at Vogue. Kurt was also working full-time the last two weeks of break to help make up for the three missed days from holidays, but also to work on projects that he hadn’t had time to tackle yet. It was a big change for Kurt to have Sam home each morning. He managed to convince Sam to do yoga with him.
Kurt had emailed back and forth with Sebastian a few times. Monday evening, he got a few photos from him. Kurt saved them to a flash drive to print for Sam to use as references for the paintings that he had agreed to do. Sebastian also shared with him that his grandpère had passed away the day before. Kurt sent his condolences. On their way back from work that evening, they stopped and printed the photos.

They also stopped by an art store and picked up the two canvases that Sam needed to do the paintings for the bedrooms that Sebastian had chosen. After they ate dinner, Sam convinced Kurt to get his sketchbook out and draw while he worked on lightly sketching out the paintings since the aspect ratio of the canvases was different from the photos themselves, Sam had to make artistic decisions about the final layout. He didn’t actually have any of his painting supplies at the apartment. He had locked them in a locker he had rented at the art co-op he’d been painting in.

The next few days were just repeats – morning work out, Vogue all day, dinner, and watching movies or playing games in the evenings. Kurt teased Sam that they needed to find a pawnshop and buy a cheap Wii and some games to have more options for entertainment.

By Thursday evening, Kurt’s curiosity got the better of him and he looked at Blaine’s Facebook page. There was new post on his wall. “Disappointed that my favorite barista seems to be MIA.”

Kurt and Sam discussed the topic they had abandoned Sunday – whether to attempt to ask Blaine to leave the two of them alone or to leave things be and hope that Blaine just backed off on his own.

“I think there’s very little hope that he’s just going to let me be. He’s obviously been coming into the Copper Cup fairly consistently. You just didn’t recognize him.”

“Now that I’m really thinking about it, back when I was in Lima before you came back, I was in line in the Lima Bean and someone that I didn’t know came up and tapped me on the shoulder. He acted like we knew each other, but I was just … I don’t even know. He startled me and acted so friendly. It was so weird. I thought he was hitting on me. I just told him to leave me alone and turned back to the front and ignored the guy. With what he’s posting, I’m betting it was him and he’s been coming in for ages knowing that I wouldn’t recognize him. Given this new information, I say you let me set up a meeting with him. Some place public. Maybe that coffee place we tried down by Central Park that you hated that we’ve never been back to.”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“I’ll text him and then reblock him. I’ll set it up so that we can go over there together, but it will have to be at like 7:00 Saturday evening because I have to work a double shift again this weekend to make up the shifts I traded to get to go see my family for Christmas.”

“That’s fine. Maybe he’ll bring Rachel so we don’t have to do this twice. But don’t invite him to. That will just let him know that we’ve been looking at his Facebook page.”

Saturday came too quickly for Kurt, but he was downstairs waiting for Sam with a sandwich in hand, knowing that Sam would be starving.

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome. I’ve been reading through my extensive list of reasons to not get back together with Blaine for the last hour.”
“Good idea. I’d appreciate it if we can avoid letting him know that I didn’t recognize him.”

“That’s actually a really good idea. If he brings it up, bragging or something, we’ll just play it off like you knew, but that you had just hoped he’d get bored of his little stalking game and quit coming to the coffee shop.”

“And that I’ve reached my limit of goodwill and I’m ready to put an end to it.”

“Also, don’t let on that we know that he knows where we live. That will just tip him off that security contacted me and prove that he found where I’m living. And no mention of Facebook or anything related to what’s going on in Lima. I had said I was taking a break from social media. I do not want him to get the impression that he can contact me online somehow.”

They stopped talking as they got closer to their destination. Kurt pulled the door open and walked through, Sam following behind him. Kurt saw Blaine immediately. He had let his hair grow out and it only had enough product in it to cut the frizz. It was styled in loose curls. He hadn’t shaved in a couple of days. Kurt actually liked this look on Blaine more than he had ever liked the massive amount of gel. He was also dressed in more typical college student clothing. His coat was hanging over the back of his chair and he was wearing an NYU pullover hoodie. Unfortunately for Kurt, it was a very good look on him.

Kurt approached the table decisively and sat down across from Blaine. Sam sat next to him.

“It’s good to see you, Kurt. Sam. Rachel will be back in a minute. She’s in line to get us drinks.”

Kurt nodded.

“Do you two want something?”

“No, thanks. As you know, I work in a coffee shop. I’ve had my fill of coffee for today.”

Kurt just shook his head no.

Rachel approached the table and placed both coffees on the table and sat next to Blaine.

“Rachel,” Kurt acknowledged, as she sat down.

No one said anything. Rachel and Blaine took sips of their coffee.

“The place where you work sells better coffee.”

Sam nodded once in agreement and the silence lingered. Rachel finally broke it, unable to hold back her need to share her good fortune.

“I’ve gotten the lead role in a new Broadway production.”

“Congratulations,” Kurt managed to sound sincere. He didn’t want her to elaborate on why she deserved it or how it was inevitable that she would originate a Broadway role.

“Thanks. I’m so excited. We go into rehearsals next week. We’re set for a late spring opening.”

Kurt didn’t say anything else.

“And you’re still at NYADA?” she asked.

“Of course. I have three semesters left. I plan to finish them.”
“Yes, right. Of course you do.”

Kurt spoke calmly, while maintaining a pointedness to his tone of voice. “Look, I am not interested in a let’s-catch-up coffee chat. Sam asked Blaine here because he’s being a creeper. I’m going to make myself very, very clear. This, right now, is our only meet up. I want you to stay away from me, NYADA, my friends, the Copper Cup, and Vogue. I don’t think either one of you actually forged any super close friendships at NYADA, but on the off chance that you did, and you get invited to a specific event, and I happen to be at that event, I want you to pretend that I am a stranger. Do not approach me, do not wave at me from across the room or attempt to get my attention in anyway. This is a metropolis. New York City has plenty of room for the two of you to have no need to interact with the two of us.”

“Kurt, don’t be like this. I understand that we rushed things in October, but we can be friends, can’t we?”

“No, we can’t. I also don’t want you to photograph me and post the pictures online – ever. As I mentioned in the text I sent to everyone, I am taking a break from social media and I would appreciate it if you would abide by that. Posting information about where you’ve seen me or what I was doing or posting a photo of me without my permission is not acceptable. You and I are not a couple. If the two of us end up in the same place by chance, ‘WE’ are not there. You are there. I am there. There is no ‘WE’ anymore.”

“You seem to have plenty of time to socialize with Sebastian. I saw you with him when I went to the NYADA Drama Department event. I admit my curiosity got the best of me and I followed you afterwards. The three of you and a group of people went skating. You went back to his place or he went back to yours because all three of you went into the same building at the end of the evening.”

“Where I go and who I spend my time with is none of your concern. You and I are not dating. You need to pay attention.” He paused, leaned forwards just slightly, and looked Blaine directly in the eyes. “Please stay away from me. The two of us are not getting back together. It’s over.”

“I understand that you’re upset…”

“Actually, I am at peace with my decision to end it. I am better off single.”

“So, you aren’t dating Sebastian?” Rachel asked.

“I just said I was single. I think that answers your question.”

“Kurt, we’ve been friends for years. Why the sudden need to turn your back on all of your friends?” Rachel asked. “We’ve known each other for over five years.”

“Stories have a beginning, a middle and an end. The story that involves the two of you and me has ended. Your story goes on. As does Blaine’s. But I no longer play a supporting role in your story. Just like any show where an actor either no longer wants to play a role or cannot, the character is written out of the show. There won’t be a reprise or surprise return of my character to your show. It’s over. To continue the metaphor – I have a new show of my own, with a very limited cast.”

“I don’t understand,” Rachel said. “You and Blaine are soulmates.”

“Your understanding is not required. I am asking you to abide by my wishes and leave me and the people I associate with alone. It’s a simple request. Please let me live in peace.” He stood up and Sam followed his lead.

“That goes for me as well,” Sam said. “Stop following me around. I gave you a chance to stop
hanging around like a creeper, but enough’s enough. Find a new place to drink coffee.”

“Goodbye, Blaine. Rachel.” Kurt turned quickly and walked toward the door. Sam followed him.

After dinner Monday, Sam took Kurt to the art co-op studio. He took the canvases and photo for the paintings that was going to hang over Sebastian’s bed and theirs with him. Kurt enjoyed watching Sam and the other artists work.

The rest of the week Kurt continued to go to the art co-op with him. He took his journal with him and alternated between working on organizing his thoughts and making a schedule for himself for the upcoming semester and watching the artists create.

Saturday Sam had to work his final double shift from the trades he had made. That left Kurt to pick Sebastian up from the airport by himself. He left going to Costco for Sunday morning so that Sebastian could do his shopping as well.

Kurt spent the morning making chocolate chip cookies, peanut butter cookies, and peanut butter cookies with chocolate chips. His experiment before Christmas led him to the conclusion that raisins were best left for oatmeal cookies, but that he did really like the chocolate chips in the peanut butter cookies, especially when made with crunchy peanut butter, which had been Sam’s suggestion way back in high school and he’d been making them that way ever since. After the cookies cooled, he put them in storage containers and cleaned the kitchen up.

He worked on his ballet and modern warm ups and did some dancing before he changed to go pick Sebastian up.

Kurt was waiting in the pick up area and got out and waved as soon as Sebastian texted him. He moved around to the back and opened the cover on the truck. As soon as Sebastian put his suitcases in, Kurt pulled him into a hug.

“I missed you.”

“You missed me?”

“Of course.” Kurt hugged him tight and then let him go so he could get in the truck.

A few tears managed to escape and ran down Sebastian’s cheeks. He reached up and wiped them. He climbed in and put his backpack on the seat in between them.

“Let’s get you home.” Kurt reached over and put his hand on Sebastian’s for a few seconds, and then put the truck in gear and pulled out to leave the airport.

They rode back in silence. Sebastian spent most of the drive looking out the windows. After they parked in the garage, Kurt opened the back. They each grabbed a suitcase and headed into the building.
Once they were in the apartment, Kurt took Sebastian’s coat and hung it up for him. “Why don’t you take a shower? You might feel better. You’ve been traveling for 14 hours and I know you feel like it’s 10:00 at night, even though it’s 4:00 in the afternoon.”

“That’s a good idea. I’ll go do that.” He grabbed the handle of the suitcase that Kurt had been pulling and went down to his room.

A few minutes later, Kurt heard the shower running. He made Sebastian a grilled cheese sandwich using his favorite cheese. He opened it up and put tomato slices in after it had cooled enough that he could touch it. He cut it in half and put it on a small plate with one of the pickle spears that Sebastian liked. He heard Sebastian starting the washer, and then he came in the dining room.

“I made you a sandwich. If rumors are to be believed, food on airplanes is not very good.” Kurt saw the faintest smile on Sebastian’s face.

He took the plate from Kurt and slid up on the counter to sit and eat it. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Would you like some lemonade? Orange juice?”

“Lemonade, please.”

Kurt poured him a glass and sat it next to him on the counter. Sebastian ate the sandwich slowly. “You made it just the way I like it.”

Kurt smiled. When Sebastian finished, Kurt took his plate and put it in the dishwasher. Sebastian hopped down and put his empty glass in as well.

“Come on.” Kurt took his hand and led him down to his own bed. “Why don’t you lie down and rest? I’d be glad to stay with you, if you’ll let me. But I’ll leave you to rest alone, if you’d like.”

Sebastian sat down, but didn’t let go of Kurt’s hand, so Kurt sat next to him. The tears began to fall.

“Nothing was right. I left feeling like I was finally getting to go home and I got there and nothing was right. Everything and everyone had changed so much. My cousin who was in diapers can read. My grandparents moved to a smaller place. No one had told me. I didn’t send real letters, so no one bothered to tell me a change of address. I have no place there. They kept some of my mom’s things boxed up for me, stacked in the corner of my grandmère’s bedroom.” He paused, trying to regain some composure.

“The night after Sam and Mercedes helped me, Sam held me. It made a huge difference. I’ll understand if you don’t want me to, but I’m offering.”

Sebastian nodded weakly. Kurt moved to lie back on the far side of the bed and held his hand out. Sebastian moved and lay down next to Kurt. After a couple of minutes, he scooted closer and laid his head on Kurt’s shoulder. Kurt wrapped his arm around Sebastian’s shoulders.

“It’s okay to cry. What you’ve been through is really sad and crying is a reasonable response.”

“My personal stuff that I didn’t bring with me when I went to Ohio was in boxes under my grandparents bed. Without my mom’s income, they couldn’t afford the place the four of us had
lived in, the place they had lived in since – forever. No one ever discussed finances with me, so I had no idea. I spent the whole time sleeping on the sofa in the living room because their, well, her place isn’t my home.”

Kurt didn’t interrupt. He gave Sebastian time to say what he needed to.

“Pascalle’s family and mine are close. His mother is friends with – that doesn’t matter. Anyway, they were at the funeral. And Pascalle didn’t know I would be there because why would he think I would be? I hadn’t been back in 3½ years. His fiancé was with him. They got engaged at Christmas. They’re getting married in July, right after they graduate.”

Kurt ran his hand along Sebastian’s upper arm.

“I’m not in love with him anymore. I wanted him to be happy and he is, but it was really hard. The emotions of struggling with how much everything had changed, losing grandpère, and seeing him with someone else – it was just a lot.”

“It is.”

“I spent one day last week going through my old stuff and her stuff. I packed the things that really mean something to me and I brought them back with me. I took the things I didn’t need or want and donated them. I repacked up the rest in boxes that could be shipped here when I get the money to do it. I put them under Grandmère’s bed. Now, there aren’t boxes taking up space in her flat, which is about half the size of this apartment.”

“I’m glad you got a chance to bring some things back.”

“It’s my great aunt’s old suitcase and she gave me the money to pay the extra baggage fee the airline charges. But I’m glad I got to bring the stuff back too.”

Kurt could tell that Sebastian was on the verge of falling sleep. He lay still and let him. Kurt thought about what it was like to come back from Dalton at winter break and live in a house that wasn’t the one he had grown up in. The furniture from his basement room was gone, except for his vanity. His mother’s dresser didn’t make the move either. It was a jarring feeling.

But Sebastian’s experience was so much harder. Any one of the situations he had faced would have been hard, but he had to face all of them pretty much alone because his grandmère had her own issues to deal with – losing her husband and planning a funeral.

He thought back to calling Sebastian a criminal chipmunk, when really he had just been an angry and hurting teen with no friends or real family in a new place.

He realized just how much he had let Sebastian into his life when he thought about him so often while he was in Paris. He wasn’t lying when he said that he had missed him.

That brought him back around to thinking about how he hadn’t been the model for accepting people either. He despised gay men being stereotyped as predatory and he dismissed Sebastian as a potential friend the instant he saw him coming on to Blaine with his ‘It doesn’t bother me, if it doesn’t bother you’ line. Blaine, who should have obviously informed Sebastian long before Kurt walked up about Kurt’s existence. Yet, he sat down and possessively reached for Blaine when he should have probably walked away in anger.

But by then he had already begun ignoring the signs that Blaine was a hypocritical attention hog. If Blaine had walked up on Sebastian flirting with him and acting like he had no idea that Blaine existed, he would have not reacted well, case in point – Chandler.
He lay there wondering how things might have been different if Sam had never left. If he had been able to get close to Sam, who was so freely affectionate without it being sexual, maybe he would have never been drawn to Blaine to start with. He knew that wasn’t true though. He wanted what he saw everyone else have – a boyfriend.

Some days he really struggled with wishing he could go back in time and just NOT go to Dalton that day to spy on the Warblers. One thought led to another, which led to at least a hundred others and an hour later, tears were streaming down Kurt’s cheeks.

When he didn’t manage to contain his sniffle, he accidentally woke Sebastian up. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to wake you up.”

“Why are you crying?”

“Too much thinking.”

“Vague.”

“I think you might understand, without thinking that I’m suicidal because I’m not. But there are times, when my mind whirls in so many directions seeing all of the places I’ve chosen a direction to go at a fork in the road and it was the wrong one. I made so many choices that were based on personal bias and others based on protecting other people. And unfortunately my thoughts frequently attack me and I consider how it would have been so much better if I had been the one to die instead of my mom. I know my mom and dad would have been sad, but their lives would have gone on. My dad would still be happy living with her in the house I grew up in. He wouldn’t have had the heart attack and ended up in a coma because she would have been better at getting him to eat right than I was. I have these same kind of thoughts about Finn. I can’t be what Finn was. My dad loves me, but Finn filled this void in my dad’s life that I can’t fill. If I had been the one to die and not Finn, my dad and Carole would still be happily living in Lima, with Finn living at home and going to college. My dad wouldn’t have sold his shop. He wouldn’t be moving to the Ohio side of Wheeling and buying a new house.”

“Oh.”

“When I went to Dalton, they bought the house that they just sold. I came back and my furniture was gone, except one piece. And my mom’s stuff was nowhere to be seen. The photos of me and my mom were all in my room. My dad was doing better, but I think he wasn’t really all the way back to himself yet after the heart attack and coma because he didn’t keep something of hers that meant a lot to me. But anyway, that’s how my thoughts spiral into a joust poking me. It’s a struggle. I was also thinking about how I told you that if you had asked me to coffee and you told me about yourself that I would have reached out to you, but what about me? Why didn’t I just reach out to you to start with? Because you hit a nerve you didn’t know about and I bristled up like a porcupine. While you were gone, I’ve spent a lot of time thinking about how I let a lot of my own prejudices control me as much as the people who bullied me. They did it loudly and publicly, but I did it through avoidance and intentional shunning of people that I never gave a chance to be a part of my life. I’m sorry that you were one of those people. I was too insecure and afraid to lose the only thing I thought was good about my life. Hindsight and self-reflection are bitches sometimes.”

Sebastian laughed. “I already accepted your apology. I forgave you. I wouldn’t have wanted to have anything to do with me back then either. And I’m pretty sure that you already know that playing the ‘what if?’ game in your mind never leads to peaceful thoughts. Unless there is something that you can choose differently now than you chose in the past, it’s best to just let those ‘what if?’ questions fade away into the past where they could have made a difference, but no longer can.”
“Like us being friends.”

“Exactly. Like us being friends.”

“I made you cookies this morning.”

“Mmm. I’ll be honest. I missed you too. You’re the first real friend I’ve made here. I know it took me a while to accept your offer of friendship because I felt like I didn’t deserve it.”

“But you do, you know. I was hoping that other than the obviously terrible part of your trip that the rest would be enjoyable. I know how much you wanted to go back.”

“I wanted to go home. My mom’s death was an accident, it happened in an instant and there was no time to prepare for it and then I was sent here so quickly that I didn’t get time to really process it. Being in Ohio was so different than my life before that sometimes it just felt like what had happened before I left wasn’t real. I would have dreams that were so real that I would wake up disoriented because I felt like being in a dorm room that was unfamiliar was the nightmare. And it would take me a couple of minutes to reorient myself to realize that Dalton was real and my dream was the imaginary part. And even once I quit having those kinds of dreams, the longing for a place where I felt like I belonged was still there because I never felt like I belonged in Ohio. I came here and it was at least more similar to Paris than Ohio was, but it still wasn’t home. And now there is no home. For either of us.”

“I know. Sam feels the same, just so you know. His parents moved to Kentucky about a month or so before you came to Ohio. He came back and lived with my family in November. When he goes to visit, he has no room that’s his. He has to share with his little brother, who’s 10 now, or sleep in the living room. When they first moved there, he had a room to himself and his brother and sister shared since they were so young. Once he came to live with us, they each got their own room.”

“Did he have a good time?”

“He did.”

“What about you? Did you have a nice time with your dad in DC?”

Kurt explained the weather situation and that he stayed in the City.

Sebastian changed the subject abruptly. “I’m not going back next fall.”

“To Paris?”

“Yeah. I always had it in my mind that I could stay here two years, get the money, go back and finally go back to my old life. But that life isn’t there and everyone has moved on. My family still loves me of course, but it’s not the same. They have 3½ years that I wasn’t part of. My other cousin, who is 9, didn’t even recognize me – he’s brother of the one that was in diapers who can read now. I’m not putting it all on my family because I didn’t do a good job keeping in contact with them. They were always just there, if that makes any sense at all. I never went out of my way to interact with them, like calling or texting because everyone saw each other often enough that I would hear what was going on with the others all the time. I was one of the great grandkids. It was the grandparents, meaning my mom’s aunt and uncles, that did all of the planning. I just showed up – the way kids do. I wasn’t used to being the initiator, especially since most all of the getting together took place where I lived. We spent a lot of time together as a family. I didn’t do anything to keep that going. I don’t know anything about them and they don’t know anything about me anymore. Anyway, while I was there I did make it to visit a couple of the universities that I had
considered before. The programs are a lot different and even if I transfer, there would be no way I could graduate in less than two years.”

“So, you’re staying.”

“Yes. I’m staying and I want you to stay too. That is if you want to. You only have another year left as well. You said you don’t think Sam will stay, but he can if he wants to.”

“Thank you. That’s a huge weight off my shoulders. You’re actually a really good roommate – and not just because you don’t charge me rent.”

Sebastian laughed.

“I’m serious. I’ve never lived with someone who is respectful. I’ve never even had the experience of being able to expect my personal property to be left alone. Or the food I had bought to still be in the kitchen. The people I’ve lived with are allergic to personal boundaries and have no understanding of the words private property.”

“You’re serious. I mean I knew they were melodramatic annoying people, but they ate your food?”

“As much as I came to love Finn, the boy never knocked and had a what’s mine is yours and vice versa attitude about things. So, borrowed things would end up not where they had been borrowed from. Everything in the fridge was fair game to Finn. I really didn’t mind so much then, unless it was something specific I had made up ahead of time for a reason, but it was still annoying. I couldn’t prep ahead like we do because anything that was already cooked he considered to be leftovers and helped himself. Even as aggravating as he could be, I miss him. He rarely did anything intentionally mean. On the other hand, when Santana moved in, it involved her showing up unannounced and staying. She went through every thing in our apartment. I mean EVERYTHING. Literally dumping our drawers out and searching everything.”

“That’s … I’m not ever sure of a word for that.”

“Invasive. Living with you is easy. Living here has been the least stressful place I’ve lived since … before junior high being stressful. Teachers do a better job making kids not bully people in elementary school. But after that, I lived in a constant state of worry that my dad would find out how I was being treated and that he would try to do something about it and in the end make it so much worse for me. There’s nothing much worse than being a ‘fairy’ that needed his daddy to fight his battles for him. So, even then I lived in a constant hypervigilant state. It was a vicious cycle. The more he knew, the more he’d worry and want to do something about it and if he did something about it the worse it would have gotten for me, making him worry even more. Working to wash clothes nearly every day without getting caught scrubbing slushie out of stuff. Covering bruises with make up. I wore long-sleeved shirts year round. In the summers, I would roll the sleeves up to my forearm once the bruises had healed about a month after school let out. Always running to catch the landline before he did, listening to all of the messages before he got home, and writing down any that were for him before deleting all of them. By the time we moved to the new house, we all had cell phones, so he didn’t see any point in a landline, which was great for me. I’ve gotten completely off topic, which was how nice it is to have a good person to live with. A complete and abrupt change of topic – are you meeting Miss July tomorrow?”

“I am. At 2:00. I was hoping that you’d go with me.”

“Sure. I asked because I waited for you to come back to go to Costco this week. So, I figured we could to that tomorrow morning.”
“That sounds good. My plan is to do my best to stay awake until 8:00 and then go to bed and sleep until I wake up, which will hopefully not be until 6:00 tomorrow morning. And you were right. I feel a lot better now. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome. Are you ready to eat the cookies I made you?”

“Almost. First, I want you to tell me more about what you did while I was gone.”

“Only if I get to see all of the photos you took and you tell me about them while we eat cookies.”

“Deal.”

The two of them slid up in the bed and moved the pillows around and got comfortable.

“It starts with Blaine and Rachel showing up on Christmas Eve morning.”

“Oh, God. I already don’t like this story. Go on…”

“By the time Sam came home, Sebastian had gone to sleep for the night. Kurt was sitting out in the living room reading a book and got Sam’s attention as soon as he came inside.

He whispered, “Sebastian’s in bed – jetlag. He feels like it’s 3:00 in the morning.”

“Got it.” Sam opened the door back up and grabbed for what he had sat outside the door. “Close your eyes.” Sam put the paintings in their bedroom under the bed and came back out. “I was going to give them to him tonight, but I’ll do it tomorrow. No peeking.”

Kurt laughed, but put his hand over his mouth. “Fine, I won’t go sneak a peek. I did watch you work on them, you know.”

“I know. How is he?”

“I won’t go into detail because it’s his story to tell, but his trip was really heartbreaking. So, the paintings being done will be something positive for him I hope. I made you cookies. And your dinner is in the fridge.”

“You are awesome!” he kept his voice as low as possible.

Kurt rolled his eyes, but still smiled. Sam headed into the kitchen and warmed his food up and stuffed a cookie in his mouth while he waited. He grabbed a couple more, put the lid on the container, and put it away. He grabbed a glass and filled it with water. He put it on the table. Once the food was warm, he grabbed a fork and the plate of food and sat down to eat. Kurt moved off the couch and joined him at the table.

“I told him what happened while he was gone. All of it. I even showed him the stuff about Lima. He showed me all of his pictures from Paris afterwards. I’d love to go there some day.”

“Are you going with him to see that dance teacher tomorrow?”

“Yeah, at two.”

“Okay. I’ll be back at 4:00.”

“I have two days before the insanity becomes reality. I got everything written into a daily schedule.
I’m going to have to eat lunch while I walk. I will have exactly no free time between 7:00am and 7:00pm. And at 7:30, I have to get started on school-related work. Songs, dances, lines, and whatever else. Those two courses I took online last semester were the ones designed to go with the internship, which is incredibly time consuming. The two extra courses I took would have been something I could have taken with the rest of the classes I have to take next semester. The hands-on parts are balanced with the academic classes. But I had all academics last semester and now I will have all of the hands-on parts at the same time. 18 hours. At least Fashion Week is pretty early in the semester.”

“Did you schedule me in somewhere?”

“We sleep in the same bed. So, you’ve got a good 7 hours, maybe 8 guaranteed every night,” Kurt teased.

Sam rolled his eyes. “So not funny. There better be some awake Sam time on that schedule somewhere.”

“We come home from Vogue and eat dinner together every evening. That gives you a good hour, seven days a week.”

“If that’s all I can get, I’ll have to make it work. But hopefully, we’re still going to see more sights. We all had a pretty long list.”

“I’ve scheduled tourist time in every other Saturday. You may have to join me ‘in progress’ though since you work until noon.”

“I might be able to switch if you give me the dates in advance for the all-day events.”

“We’ll figure it out.”

“I’ll demonstrate a 16-count phrase, you repeat it.”

Sebastian nodded.

They went back and forth for about 15 minutes. Cassie stopped and turned the music off and sat down on the floor to stretch.

“So, I need to know how to make this work. Can you be here at 8:00 Monday through Thursday? I can teach you the dances before class, and then you’d be here for the actual classes from 8:45-9:30. I don’t think you need to be in my advanced class. I want you to be my partner in the advanced class. Usually I just grab the best male dancer and he dances with me, but that shorts the class a male dancer. The class isn’t large enough to justify the cost of paying a TA, so I never get one. BUT if you’re available from 8:00-9:30, then you can be my partner. The problem is compensation of some sort.” She stood back up and held her hands out to Sebastian. “Dance with me again and prove to me that I should ride the subway here four days a week instead of taking a taxi so I can pay you myself.”

He laughed and got up.

“Let’s see how much you remember. We’re going to do the whole thing.”

She turned the music back on. They danced together like they had been doing it for years.
“Fine, fine. You’ve won my heart. Be here Tuesday morning at 8:00. I’ll pay you $50 a week myself. But you cannot under any circumstances TELL anyone that I have a heart.”

Sebastian nodded and smirked. “I can do that.”

When Kurt and Sebastian got back to the apartment, Sam was waiting for them in the living room. He got up off the sofa and moved towards Sebastian’s coat closet. Once Sebastian had hung his coat up, Sam blocked him from entering the hallway.

“Close your eyes.” He guided Sebastian down to his and Kurt’s room first. He walked him through the doorway and turned him so that he was facing their bed. “Open them.”

“Oh, wow. It’s perfect. I can’t believe you already finished it. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I’m glad you like it. Go in your room.”

Sebastian stepped into his room. “You got both of them done? How did you have time?”

“Well, just like the living room paintings, I used acrylics instead of oil paint. It dries quickly so I can keep painting without having to worry about the paint smearing.”

“I’m taking them both to get them framed tomorrow. They’re perfect.”

“Can you tell us about them?” Kurt asked.

“Sure. There’s nothing really remarkable about either place. They aren’t on the list of tourist attractions of Paris. The one in here is a street view of the area where I did my shopping. That’s my favorite bookshop and I spent a lot of time at that café next door sitting at the outdoor tables reading books that I had bought at the bookshop.”

“That’s cool,” Sam said.

“The one in the other room is a photo of a small park with a pond. I used to spend time there reading both schoolwork and for personal enjoyment. People mostly go there to walk around or sit outside and enjoy the view, so it was always a nice peaceful place to spend time.”

“Well, it’s really pretty,” Kurt said.

“I had to look back through old photos to find that picture because obviously the flowers and trees aren’t in bloom in the winter. But they both look great.”

“Adam’s going to be here at 5:00, right?” Sam asked.

“Yes, so let’s go get the cookies in the oven and get the dough made.”

Kurt opened the door to let Adam in. He took the bag in Adam was carrying so that he could get his coat off. He opened the closet and hung his coat up. He dropped his backpack on the floor in front of the shoe cabinet. Kurt took the bag over to the kitchen and sat it next to the counter. Adam came over and started emptying it.

“Red peppers, green peppers, onions, mushrooms, olives, spinach, minced chicken, and finely chopped turkey bacon.” He put small storage bowls on the counter.
Sebastian started taking all of the lids off and putting them next to the cheese.

“Perfect,” Kurt said. “We have shredded provolone, mozzarella, and parmesan. I think we’re set.”

“Let the masterpiece pizza making begin,” Sam said in his best documentary narrator voice.

They passed the ingredients up and down the counter as they all created their own personal pizzas. Kurt and Sebastian shared a cookie sheet, as did Sam and Adam. Once they were done, Kurt put both cookie sheets in the oven and set the timer.

“So, *Doctor Who* marathon tonight and tomorrow morning, we’re headed to?” Adam asked.

Sam answered, “The Museum of Modern Art. I know you’ve been before, but it was on your list with an asterisk that you liked it so much that you wanted to go back. We figured that with it being MLK day that the museums that appeal more to kids would be packed since there’s no school tomorrow.”

“Definitely.”

“Speaking of artwork, Sam finished two more paintings I commissioned. I’m excited. They’re really good.”

“Can I see?”

“Sure. They’re still out.”

Everyone followed Sam down to the bedrooms.

“Go ahead,” Sebastian said.

They all followed Adam inside Sebastian’s room.

“Oh, that’s really nice. I like that. It makes me want to walk down the street and go explore one of those stores.”

Sam smiled and stepped back out of the room so they could move to the other bedroom.

“Oh, now this one makes me want to sit out by the pond and read. It’s lovely.”

“Thank you.” He picked it up and went back to Sebastian’s room and grabbed the painting off the bed and slipped them both under Sebastian’s bed.

The oven started beeping and they went back into the kitchen. Sebastian turned the TV on and loaded the DVD into the player. Kurt cut the pizzas up. Sam got drinks for everyone. Adam plated and distributed the pizzas. Kurt came in, grabbed the remote, turned the light off, and sat down between Sebastian and Adam, who was holding his plate of pizza for him. He took his plate back, pressed play.

“Allons-y!” Kurt said.

The Museum of Modern Art was amazing as Adam said it was and the other three thought it would be. The four of them went their separate ways at 1:30. Kurt and Sam left for Vogue. Sam had managed to get the morning off, but they both had to work that afternoon. Sebastian headed to a couple of bookstores to buy his books for the semester. Adam went to meet with one of his
Kurt and Sam stopped by an office supply store on the way home after work and Kurt bought two really durable binders for the semester and he printed the weekly calendars that he had made for the semester on cardstock. He used the 3-hole punch and put them in the half-inch binder he bought.

For his musical at the retirement home, he bought dividers and an insert with a Velcro closure that held full sheets of paper to go in the larger binder. That way he would have a place to store notes and additions in a place they couldn’t end up lost before he had a chance to incorporate them. Since he had done the work for the first half of the internship in the fall, he knew what he was doing this time around and he planned to do a much better job of it the second time around.

With the change in semester schedules, it was Kurt and Sebastian who were up early and out of the apartment. They went to NYADA together. Kurt had three classes each morning before he left to go to the Lexington Home. He ate his lunch as he walked from there to Vogue. Sebastian spent the rest of the day in classes and studying at Columbia. They kept up with their previous arrangement of eating dinner together each evening.

Sam worked it out with a coworker so that each of them would have every other Saturday off and the opposite Saturday, they’d work a 12-hour shift.

While they ate dinner, they updated their schedules to begin planning for the rest of their New York City sightseeing. When they were done, they had 9 Saturdays of sightseeing arranged and marked off to keep from planning anything else on those days.

By the time Friday night came around, Kurt was worn out. Sebastian had put vegetable soup in the crock pot and had it on the table when Kurt and Sam walked in. They ate together and watched the new episode of *The Librarians* on TV.

After it was over, Kurt brought up the issue of their new schedules. He suggested that he and Sebastian cook the meat and maybe some of the dishes in advance when the got back from Costco each week and Sam could join in when he got home. They sat around looking up quick meals and crock pot options and worked out a new menu. Sam told them that his boss at the coffee shop had asked him to come back and work 6:00-8:00 weekdays to help cover the morning before-work rush of customers.

After they finished, Kurt took an early shower and went to bed, deciding that he’d be better off sleeping and getting up early to do his weekly write up since he had turned himself into an even earlier riser since he had returned to the City.

Sam and Sebastian decided to try one of the breakfast casserole recipes that Sam had found and prepped it. Adam was due to arrive at 9:00 the next morning, so they could all eat together before they headed out spend the day at The MET.

Two weeks went by and Kurt had stuck to his schedule and was keeping his head above water. Sam had continued to spend most weekday evenings after dinner at the art co-op since sitting round in an apartment with the atmosphere of a library wasn’t much fun when he didn’t enjoy reading. He made quite a few friends with the other people in the art co-op and it filled the void in his life that being part of a sports team filled – just having a group of people to hang around with and talk to and have fun. That Saturday, they spent the day at the Museum of Natural History, which they all loved.
Sunday Kurt got up at 5:15 when Sam did. He did his yoga workout, ate quickly, and moved right to his schoolwork. Fashion week was going to start mid-week and would last for a week, leaving him little to no time for an entire week. He had planned as carefully as he could. He just hoped none of his instructors or professors added anything new to the previously assigned tasks.

Several hours later, when he and Sebastian got back from Costco, the two of them were in the kitchen together putting away what they had bought and were working on prepping their meals for the following week.

“Am I driving you crazy with my insane scheduling of everything?”

“No. Your ‘insane scheduling’, as you call it, only intersects with my schedule in a few places. You’re not scheduling my life to the point where I need to consult my planner to know if I can breathe. I’m worried about you though.”

“Three weeks down, twelve to go. I’ve been busier than this before. And this time, I don’t have anyone sabotaging my organization or demanding that I rearrange something to accommodate for a last-minute change that could have been anticipated and worked in without so much stress. And I have a regular work schedule, so I’m not always flailing to rearrange my schedule at the last minute on a weekly basis. It’s practically unheard of for a big fashion event to be put on at the last minute. There’s way too much preparation and pageantry required.”

Sebastian laughed. “I hadn’t thought about it, but you’re right. They announce the dates for things like that a year in advance sometimes.”

“Which is super helpful for a guy like me with a tight schedule. How are you holding up?”

“I’m a lot busier, but I had really missed dancing, so it’s fun. And Cassie pays me, but she also somehow got Columbia to accept 2 credits of dance. So, I’m officially enrolled in both classes – something about non-students and non-staff and liability. I didn’t bother to try to follow what she said. I just smiled and thanked her. I don’t really need the credits, but I didn’t want to be ungrateful. And she’s already offered me a real position as her TA in both classes next year once I can get my documents back and work legally.”

“Well, that’s good. Are you going to do it?”

“I think so. As long as things keep going the way they are and I can fit it into my schedule. I had forgotten how much energy it gives me to perform. It’s been a long time – two years.”

“You were a great lead singer for the Warblers. Anyone watching you could see how much you loved it. I wouldn’t admit it back then because I was mad at you, but you were a better lead than Blaine.”

“Thanks.”

“You succeeded at what I tried and failed at – you got them to dance. At Regionals that year, I really think the Warblers were better than we were in a lot of ways. I don’t know what made the judges choose us. The judges were very rarely people who knew anything about music. I wouldn’t be surprised if some of them thought your band was off-stage or you were using a backing track and didn’t even realize that the Warblers were an a cappella group. I saw a video of your Sectionals performance that next fall. The group was great. I think the rule that disqualified the New Directions was dumb. They should have been allowed to start again either with our without Marley
because ignoring a medical issue is dangerous. The rule was amended. But I think the Warblers were on point that competition. I think there was good chance that the Warblers would have won even if the New Directions had been given a chance to start over. Hunter may have been an awful person or whatever, but he was a good performer.”

“He was.”

“How are you doing?”

“Okay, I guess. I’ve talked to my therapist about the same things I told you when I came back. It’s helping. I’m working on long-term and short-term goal setting. It will supposedly help me focus my mind forward rather than backward. I think as much as it hurt to go back, it has really made things a lot more clear. Since I made the short-term decision to finish my degree here, now I need to work to make a long-term decision about whether going back or staying here is what I want since going home isn’t an option. I had carried around the longing to return home for so long that it had become my only long-term goal. It was why I was following my father’s rules. It was why I kept to myself. I didn’t want to forge new friendships that I knew I would leave behind. I did that before and I didn’t want to do it again. So, I’ve had this long-term goal for 3½ years that is no longer a possibility. I’m working through the grieving involved in losing my grandpère and the demise of the only long-term goal I’ve had since I arrived in Ohio. If I go back to Paris, my family will include me in everything again, of course, but it will never be what it was or what I had thought it would be. And when my grandmère passes away the last tie that binds everyone together will be gone. The whole family dynamic will change. Let me see if I can explain. When my mom’s parents died, my great-grandparents took over their role, even though my mom was an adult. So, my grandmother’s siblings were all still part of my extended family, but they don’t all live in the heart of Paris. But we had a big place, not big like big houses in Ohio, but big by Paris standards. So, grandmère was the matriarch. People came to us. My cousins and I would sleep in the living room and the adults would take the bedrooms. But now that she’s living in a small one-bedroom place, there’s none of that type of thing happening. My great aunt and uncles have started transporting my grandmère to their places. And the events have become divided with my great aunts and uncles being the driving force behind the event planning and my grandmère is an invited guest.”

“So, the leadership has moved down a generation. Makes sense.”

“It does. Except that you have to factor in that I don’t have anyone in that generation because my grandparents are dead and so is my mother. And by the time I go back, I will have been gone for five years. So, when my great aunt thinks of getting her kids and grandkids together at her place, my name won’t just automatically come to mind. When one of my great uncles plans a cookout, he may never think to invite me. The great-grandkids vary a lot in age, from like 6 to mid-twenties. And I’m not close to any of them anymore. I never was close like brotherly close. We spent time together play games, chasing each other, watching movies, just whatever was going on at the time. But like I said, these get-togethers were frequent enough that I never felt the need to talk to any of them outside the family events. Then, I left. I was gone. I was angry and sad and to be honest, I couldn’t bear to hear them tell me what I had missed out on. And I had little of interest to say to them. I mean, what would telling them about rural Ohio be compared to them telling me about taking the high speed train to the Loire Valley to visit the castles?”

“I get it. The family is dividing and you don’t fit anywhere right now. You’d have to go back and work at it and figure out which of the new family heads you fit best with and work to become part of their group. Not that they wouldn’t let you, but it’s not an automatic, easy fit like you had before.”
“Right.”

“Were you going to live at home and got to college?”

“Yes. It was that or come here to Columbia. Honestly, I hadn’t made a decision yet. I would have applied to Columbia because I was supposed to, but to be honest, I probably wouldn’t have gone through with it. I liked my life and being wealthy wasn’t my dream. College is free in France. I could have lived at home for the whole time and not had to work. I would have continued to live there even after I got a job. There was no tension or stress living with them. They weren’t pushing me out. I had dreams of getting married, having a family, and my kids getting to have the life that I did. They would have grown up where I grew up. If I had been there, my grandpère wouldn’t have sold their place. He told me so. It was to be mine. If I had stayed there instead of going to Ohio, I could have gotten a job to help cover the expenses. And my great aunt and uncles would have helped. But they all thought I would stay here and that there was no point in keeping the large place. And by selling it and buying a small place, it provided my grandmère and grandpère with enough money to live on for however long they lived.”

Kurt turned the heat off and slid the pan back. He stepped closer to Sebastian and pulled him into a hug. “I didn’t realize. You didn’t just lose your home, you lost the future you had planned for yourself.”

Sebastian wrapped his arms around Kurt and let himself be held. They stayed that way for a while. Eventually Sebastian pulled back a bit and Kurt relaxed his hold, so he could step back.

“Thanks. So, that’s what the long-term goal setting is about. I have to rethink everything. This apartment is nice and it’s perfect for me now and even as a college graduate working a job, it’s still perfect. Even if I eventually get married, it would still be fine. But is it where I want to raise a family? Do I even still want a family if I stay here? It wouldn’t be anything at all like what I had growing up. Unless I found someone who is a native New Yorker with a big extended family. Obviously, going back to Paris and figuring out which group in my extended family to make myself part of and living there would be most similar to what I had always envisioned my life to be. And once I get the next part of my trust fund, I could afford to live in Paris.” He quit talking for a few minutes. “I do really understand what you were saying when I came back and we talked. About thinking about how it would have been better if it had been me that day. My mom would still be in Paris, taking care of grandmère like things were supposed to be.”

“And like you told me that day, we can’t let ourselves think that way, even though it’s easy to. I don’t believe in God or fate or destiny. So, I don’t think that I’m here for some cosmic purpose that someone who died couldn’t have fulfilled. But I have to keep believing that I can somehow make the world a better place. We both can. I haven’t figured out how yet, but I can’t give up. Spending time at the retirement home and talking to everyone, it just makes me feel so torn a lot of the time because all of them tell me, ‘Don’t be so serious, Kurt. You have to enjoy life.’ But I’m not sure when that gets to happen in this city because it’s so ridiculously expensive to live here. Three to four years of paying what it would cost to rent an apartment like this and I could buy a house nicer than the one my parents just sold – 3000 sq feet, 4 bedrooms, an office, 3½ baths, 3 levels, nice backyard, and a two-car garage. I just don’t know anymore. I do know that I have to survive the next 12 weeks and do well or I won’t move on to my final year and everything I’ve struggled so hard to do will have all been in vain.”

“I have an idea.”

“What?”

“If I save up all of the cash Cassie pays me, we could go on a trip over spring break. Somewhere
that other people won’t go. So, no Florida or beaches. I’ll have to work on the destination part. We could take our food with us. Rent a cabin or a hotel room with a mini-kitchen and just relax for a few days. Actually really relax. No Blaine spying on you. No work to do. No schoolwork.”

“I might go crazy. I’ve never done nothing before.”

Sebastian hip checked him. “It could be fun. And it won’t be doing nothing. We’ll be busy having fun.”

“What makes you think Blaine is spying on me?”

“You said that you think he’ll try to friendzone himself into getting you to trust him again. And he needs the attention. Plus, I know you saw him at NYADA the other day. I saw you see him.”

Kurt closed his eyes for a minute. “I was trying to convince myself that I was imagining things.”

“I wish. I really do. He was talking to a couple of guys, so I’m assuming that they were people he knew from going to NYADA.”

“They are. I just didn’t know he was close friends with either of them. But who’s to say he wasn’t letting them fuck him behind my back? Sam said he wouldn’t answer about whether he had cheated on me after he came to New York. If he’s trying to make me jealous, it won’t work. I feel sorry for Alex or Ross, whichever one he’s wowing with his charm. I wouldn’t wish that on anyone. Or maybe he was just hanging around talking to them while he was supposedly waiting on me. You know, taking selfies with them, tagging them on Instagram or Facebook – making it look like he and I are still together. I demanded that he not photograph me or post information about me on social media, but I can’t control what he says and he was already making it out like we were here together. For all I know, he told people we had an open relationship, but only if one of us initiated it. You know, to keep guys from approaching me or him, so I wouldn’t find out. Whatever. It doesn’t matter. He can live in whatever state of denial he’s in. He hasn’t actually broken any of the demands I made. He’s not actually trying to interact with me. I can’t ban him from the buildings on campus.” Kurt looked around the kitchen. “I think we’ve cooked everything.”

“I’ll get the bowls out. Living with you has been very educational. If you weren’t already consulting your schedule on when to breathe, you could start a YouTube channel with ‘How to be an Organized Adult’ videos on there.”

Kurt laughed. “Most days I struggle to feel like an adult myself.”

“Oh, you’re very much an adult, but I know the feeling. I wonder if maybe we never will feel older. Maybe it’s like those ridiculous birthday memes – you know ‘21 with 19 years experience’.”

“Maybe. I think you’ll feel a lot more like an adult after your birthday this summer because you won’t be under your father’s thumb anymore. If you want to buy a hot dog off a street vendor cart, there won’t be anything to stop you.”

“Other than my fear of food poisoning.”

Kurt rolled his eyes. He helped pack up the stuff they had cooked.

“You’re right though. I have not really been living like an adult even though I’ve been one legally since not long after I got here.”

“You’ve never mentioned any half-siblings.”
"Because I don’t have any. I’m guessing that my stepmother is quite pleased with her charity work and life of leisure. Getting pregnant might have ruined her perfect figure and caused her to have to be human."

"Wow."

“She doesn’t mind me. I came already housebroken. We have a mutual avoidance agreement we made through her quite expressive eye rolling when I arrived. She’s like a high-end violin bow, and she plays my dad like a pro. If there were a book on how to schmooze a narcissist, she’d be the one to write it. She is the queen of flattery.” Sebastian changed his speaking voice to imitate a woman, “Oh, darling, that suit looks spectacular on you. I knew it would. You’re going to look fantastic at that fundraiser tonight. And then she’d whisper something in his ears that made his eyes flash.”

Kurt laughed.

“Oh, she’s a master at it. She gets everything she wants from him. And from what I could see, he doesn’t run around on her. She’s got a whole collection of lingerie. I saw some of it hanging to dry in the laundry room one day when I showed up before the maid expected me to. She turned 6 shades of red. But whatever weird co-dependent narcissistic thing they have going on, it seems to work for them. And she doesn’t like him paying attention to me, so that keeps him occupied.”

"TMI."

Sebastian laughed. “That’s what I thought about you when we first met, until I realized that what you said wasn’t a euphemism for anything."

“What are you talking about?” Kurt started making lunch while Sebastian washed the stuff they had already gotten dirty.

“When you mentioned your skin-sloughing-over-the-phone evening regimen.”

“Oh, my God. You thought I was bragging about phone sex.”

Sebastian laughed. “Bingo! But then I realized quickly that you were serious. You were doing some kind of skin care thing.”

Kurt shook his head. “At that point, he and I had done barely more than chastely kiss. You know the rest of how that went.”

“Yeah, and I still feel sick about it. That’s one of the things that I just can’t forgive myself for.”

Kurt stopped what he was doing and faced Sebastian. “Look at me.”

Sebastian grabbed the towel and dried his hands. He turned towards Kurt, still not making eye contact.

“Sebastian, look me in the eyes, please. Blaine used you too. He wasn’t getting his ego stroked enough at McKinley. It wasn’t Blaine and the Pips like it had been at Dalton. The New Directions were more like a group of cats. Wildly talented cats.”

Sebastian grinned.

“The Warblers are more like dogs. They behave. They do what’s expected of them. Blaine liked the attention you paid to him. He craved it. He missed being the leader of the pack. He could never
rally the support of the New Directions like he did the Warblers. Not even his senior year. I’m pretty certain that he didn’t go back to Dalton when Hunter stole the trophy because of Hunter. Hunter was charismatic and he had been brought to the school to lead the group. Blaine knew he could never regain his leader-of-the-pack status with Hunter there, so he stayed at McKinley and turned to Sam and eventually Tina as his supply of never-ending attention. Sam was lonely. He was living with my parents while I was here and Finn was in Georgia. Tina had a huge, massive crush on Blaine. She had been pushed to the background for so long, that she latched onto his attention like lifeboat.”

Kurt paused.

“Tangent. Not my point. My point was this, if it hadn’t been you, it would have been someone else. I wasn’t enough. Think about it. Very rarely did Blaine have only one source of admiration. Briefly when he switched schools it was just me, but even then he had Rachel. Not long after school started, he got the lead in the musical and got to be the center of attention. I’m not sure that there is any one person who can provide Blaine with the amount of attention that he needs. Maybe that’s why he publicly accused me of cheating. You had quit talking to him and he only had me and Rachel again and according to him I was so focused on New York that I was making him feel unloved. And Rachel was completely self-absorbed because of her wedding, Quinn’s accident, and then Finn running for Prom King with Quinn. Blaine was being passive/aggressive with me and not showing up to dates and claimed that he was practicing what it would be like without me in Lima. Publicly accusing me of cheating on him pulled everyone to his side in a heartbeat. He and Rachel can stroke each other’s egos because they’re not competing for anything. She can be the best and he can be the best and they can be the best at the same time. Losing my focus.”

He stopped again.

“Back to that fall, you came along with your swagger and charm and started complimenting him from the get-go. Whatever it was that you said – that the Warblers wouldn’t shut up about how sexy and how talented he was – that hooked him. And it didn’t take long for him to latch on to you that fall. He needed to keep you around. I wasn’t taking his side about how he deserved the male lead at Sectionals with Rachel. Finn made Glee a reality. Before he joined, there were five of us. When he joined, other football players and some cheerleaders joined. Finn was our male lead. As much as I wanted it to be me and as good as Artie was, Mr. Schue never saw us as lead material. But Blaine saw himself moving into Finn’s position when he transferred. It wasn’t happening like he had envisioned it. The musical was winding down and the weekend after we went to Scandals was the end of it. No more ‘Great job!’ from Artie or gushing praise from Rachel or cute little excited claps from Miss Pillsbury when a scene went well in rehearsal. You offered him a new supply of attention. Whether you did it to spite me or not, he would have gone looking for a new source of attention. You just happened to be there. Stop blaming yourself for a choice I made. I was threatened by you, but instead of examining his behavior that night carefully and talking to someone, like even a teen helpline, I just decided that keeping him was worth doing whatever it took. I thought I thought that if I gave him all of me that it would be enough. I was wrong, of course. I’ll never be enough for him.”

“You had perfected the art of looking calm, cool, collected, and confident no matter how you actually felt. And breaking through that became a game. But it wasn’t – it was mean.”

“And you’ve apologized many times. And I forgave you. You’re right that I worked hard to create that mask. And I wear it almost all the time because if I don’t, I really will drown. Being an actor is all about convincing people that I’m someone that I’m not. If I come across as scared and unsure of myself or neurotic and bossy that will not help me get a part unless that is how the character is. But that would only be for the brief time that I would be in character, the rest of the time, I’m supposed
to be poised and polished. But for the first time, I’m trying out being myself here in the apartment and when the three or four of us go out together.”

“I know. I happen to like the real you.”

“Golly gee wilikers.” He mock punched Sebastian’s upper arm. “I like the real you too.”

Sebastian went back to washing the dishes. “I see you slip the mask on as we enter the building at NYADA. You morph into confident, yet quiet, ‘Kurt the NYADA student’. I’m sure that you do the same at Vogue. I can guarantee that Isabelle wouldn’t have so many fabulous things to say about you if you doubted everything you do when you’re there.”

“Of course not. But I am also myself with her because around her I don’t feel like that insecure kid who isn’t enough or some crazy over-the-top weirdo. She made me feel welcome and accepted from the very first time we met. She told me she was from Ohio and she said that she had been to Lima before. I showed her outfits I had created, things I had made, and she just talked to me like I was a real person with perfectly acceptable and interesting ideas that she wanted to hear about. No one had ever been interested, not like that. So, you’re right, you would see a confident Kurt at Vogue, but it’s not fake.”

“Can I ask you something?”

“You can ask me anything.” Kurt started drying dishes.

“Think about what you just said. Do you not notice something really obvious?”

“What?”

“What were we just talking about?”

“Masks, being myself?”

“Exactly. At NYADA, you’re constantly stressed and you feel like you can’t be yourself. You have to be some acceptable-to-NYADA version of yourself. But at Vogue, you’re confident, but it’s not fake.”

“Oh.”

“I’ve heard you talk more about how the clothes an actor was wearing reflected some aspect of their personality or how they messed with the scene’s mood more than how an actor approached a scene. Be honest, how many times have you stopped a DVD to inspect what an actor was wearing versus stopping and rewatching a scene repeatedly to see what an actor did to portray the emotion of a scene. I’m not being critical. I promise.”

“I guess I never really thought about it, but you’re right. When we have to do scenes in class and we have to wear all black for our performance, I never really enjoy watching my classmates as much as I do when we get to wear costumes.”

“Your mask includes your clothing. It makes sense. All the layers and buttons and how many clothes you owned. They had a big job to do and you needed a lot of options.”

“And now?”

“And now your clothes still play a role, but I don’t think you’re using them as armor like you used to.”
“Maybe I need to rethink my coursework for next year. I’m already in Advanced Costume Design. I could talk to my professor and see what my other options are after this course. You are right. When I read a play, I spend a lot of time thinking about what the characters would wear and the lighting in the scene would affect the costumes. I do love to sing and perform though. Maybe I just need time away from the pressure of everything that NYADA became and still is in a way with Blaine lurking around. I don’t know, but I will add it to my journal and really think about it.”

“Shouldn’t Sam have been here by now? I think we should go ahead and eat and put his in the fridge.”

“That’s fine.” Kurt put Sam’s lunch in a container and put it in the fridge and plated his and Sebastian’s part. He carried the plates to the table.

Sebastian followed behind with silverware, napkins, and two glasses of water.

“I suppose you have a lot of schoolwork to do?”

“That’s the weird part. I have a lot of things I need to do, but it’s not like it’s something simple like – read these 50 pages and write a short essay. It’s – look through all of the handwritten notes I took during our read-throughs this last week and the notes the other people made and figure out if there’s something I can do to fix whatever the issue is. And make sure I remember the dance piece we’re working on. And practice the song I have to present on Thursday, which I don’t know how to do. I’m not comfortable going to NYADA alone after I get off. There aren’t that many people in the building and I’m just nervous. It’s hard to do a good job practicing if I keep listening for footsteps. I don’t want to drag Sam there just because I’m scared. And I also don’t want to backtrack and then not get home until after 9:00. I don’t want to buy a keyboard and annoy you to death by practicing the same song over and over again for 30 minutes or something. I don’t have a working solution.”

“You could practice in your room and just let me know and I could shut my door and put headphones on. I could get some noise-cancelling ones and listen to music. That should block out your singing if it gets on my nerves.”

“I’ll buy a set of noise-cancelling headphones for the keyboard so I can use them when I’m working on composing. And you can use them when I’m using the keyboard to practice my singing.”

“That’s fine too.”

“I don’t want you to spend money because I’m too scared to be at NYADA by myself.”

“I don’t blame you. It would be pretty creepy if the buildings are mostly empty.”

“Thanks for not teasing me.”

They cleaned up after eating and Kurt pulled his phone out to start searching for a keyboard and headphones and grabbed his journal to make some notes and sat down on the sofa. Sebastian joined him on the couch with one of his textbooks.

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Two hours later, Sam finally came home. Kurt looked up from the dining table where he had spread all of his notes out in an attempt to organize them to mark up his script. Sebastian was still sitting on the couch, reading a different textbook.
“Hey. Your lunch is in the fridge. We didn’t know when you’d be here so I put it away.”

“Thanks. It’s been a crazy day.” Sam grabbed his food and a fork. He took the lid off and started to eat, forgoing warming it up. He paced around while he ate. “So, I hadn’t said anything because I didn’t want to upset you, but Blaine obviously figured out when I still work. I don’t know if he asked and someone told him or if he just kept coming in until he figured it out. He’s been bringing a guy in with him recently. So, today they were getting a little loud and several customers complained. I had to go over to their table and ask them to quiet down. And he introduces me to his friend, Rhys. He tells Rhys that we knew each other back in high school and were roommates for a while here in New York. Well, Rhys is a good-looking Irish guy who reaches out to shake my hand and when he looks up, he tells me that he recognizes me from the ads on the buses. Blaine tells me that he and Rhys met at a piano bar that has open mic nights and he’s been going and playing. I smile and nod and tell them customers have complained and could they keep it down a bit. And he hit me with a ‘You need to loosen up. You used to be so much fun.’ type of response. I don’t remember his exact words. I went back to work. It just really got on my nerves.”

“I watched this video on how to keep from being jealous of the new supply.”

“Supply?”

“It was the word some of the people use for the attention giver – the person that’s always building up the narcissist and telling them they’re special or talented or good looking or whatever.”

“Ah. Okay.”

“So, the video talked about how narcissists will flaunt their new supply to their old supply. You know like taking their new boyfriend or girlfriend to places where they are certain to run into you. They do it to show that they don’t need you anymore because they’ve found someone new.”

“I’m pretty sure he’s not gay. He recognized me from the bus ads, but he didn’t flirt with me or anything and he wasn’t being flirty with Blaine. They were just being loud and laughing a lot.”

“So, he’s bringing Rhys around to show you that he’s found a new friend and to show you what you’re missing out on. He would keep Rhys around for extra attention, but I am certain that he would give you your bestie spot back. Did he slip the name of this piano bar during your brief conversation?”

“Oh yeah. He invited me to come hear him play. I left that part out. Sorry. So, I should just ignore the two of them when they come in?”

“I would just treat them like any other customers. No personal info exchanged, either direction. Take their orders and fill them if they get in your line and just go on like they’re just two people in a city of millions of people. People buying coffee, keeping you employed.”

“Good plan. It just got under my skin when we specifically told him to stay out of the Copper Cup.”

“He’s been at NYADA too. I had hoped I was imagining things, but Sebastian’s seen him too. He’s talking to people he knew when he was at NYADA last year. Like he’s just part of the background. He hasn’t said a word to me or tried to interact in anyway. But I told you that I figured his plan would be to just be around until I get used to him being there. With you, he seems to be trying to get you to feel jealous of Rhys and lure you to go hear him play, where he would no doubt play something to reignite your warm feelings toward him – some song that the two of you sang together or as a group or even a solo you sang. He wants you to miss the fun times and come back
to him. He is also preventing you from saying what you want by bringing a human shield. He knows you are a nice person and that you don’t have the nerve to say what you’d want to if he has someone sitting with him. So, he gets away with breaking the boundary we set up.”

“If I ignore him, do you think he’ll quit coming?”

“Maybe eventually. I’m not sure how far out of his way he’s going to get coffee there, but if it’s a commute, like if he’s living near the NYU campus, it seems like he would eventually give up, but I don’t know. If Rhys lives near here, he may just keep it up since it would be a convenient place for Rhys. He’s not breaking any of the boundaries I set up for me, but he’s walking up to the edge and keeping his toes just back from the line. Standing in the hall where he knows I’ll see him talking to two gay guys is hardly staying away from me. But I’m going to keep doing what I’m doing – ignore him. I’m actually going to rethink the way we’ve been going to studio and just start taking a different route to get there. I’ll see how many different ways I can come up with and I’ll start using different routes so he can’t predict where I’ll be. I’ve only seen him early in the mornings, so I’m assuming he leaves campus and goes to his own classes.”

Sebastian said, “If you want, I’ll go with you on Fridays as well. Since I’m officially enrolled in those two dance courses, I bet I’m allowed to use the practice rooms.”

“I don’t want you to have to go out of your way when he’s not being threatening or anything.”

“We already talked about how I wish I could practice the dances on my own time. It would keep you from being alone when he’s hanging around AND I could practice like I said I wanted to. So, it’s a win/win.”

Kurt smiled. “Sure. Do you need to read what you’re reading right now or can you take the time to be completely unproductive and watch TV with me? How about you Sam? Are you up for something that is completely useless and utterly entertaining?”

Sebastian answered, “I can read more tomorrow. I’m all up for some ridiculousness. Monty Python?”

“Of course,” Kurt said.

“I’m in,” Sam said. “I’m just going to go put some sweats on or something and toss my uniforms into the washer.”

Sebastian went to his room and put his textbook back. When he came out, he stood behind Kurt who was looking over all of the notes he had spread out on the table.

“Can I make a suggestion? You can take it or leave it since I don’t know the details of what you’re doing. But it looks to me like it might be useful to number the bottom of the script pages and to give the actors a set of post-notes. Then they can write their suggestion or whatever on the post-it note with the corresponding page number and their name at the top. Then you can easily just stick the post-it notes on the right pages until you get time to incorporate them or make the small changes. That way you don’t have all these separate pages where people have written down notes from a whole hour that don’t tell you where the information fits.”

Kurt stood up out of his chair and hugged Sebastian. “That’s brilliant. I’ll go buy a big package of them tomorrow. It’s worth a shot. This is driving me nuts. This is why people have assistants – so someone else can take good notes while the person in charge is listening and trying to understand people’s ideas. But maybe the post-it notes will help. I’ll give it a week and see if it makes a difference. I’m going to move the notes I’ve already integrated to the file in my room and then I’m
ready to start the DVD.”
“So, you’ve made it halfway through the semester, are you ready for our spring break road trip?” Sebastian asked Kurt.

“Even if I’m not, you managed to persuade Isabelle to give me the whole week off and Sam got the whole week off as well from BOTH of his jobs.”

“You know you love the idea.”

“Of sitting next to you in a truck for hours on end?”

Sebastian hip checked him. “Of course. You know you’re excited.”

“Uh huh. Whatever.” Kurt pulled more clothes out of the dryer and folded them. Once he finished he grabbed the stack and took it to his room and returned for the clothes on hangers, which he hung in his closet.

Sebastian followed him. “You don’t want to go?”

Kurt turned and looked at Sebastian and smiled genuinely. “Of course I do. I’m just practicing my skills at looking disinterested.”

Sebastian rolled his eyes and harrumphed. “You can’t keep getting better at acting.”

Kurt looked at him confused.

“If you do, I’ll never be able to tell when you’re being sincere. I’ll feel like you’re back to wearing a mask and blocking me out.”

“I was just teasing you. If I didn’t want to go, I wouldn’t be packing right now. Remember, new me? The one who tells his friends the truth about how he feels about things and doesn’t lie just to keep the peace.”

“Yes, I know. But your mask is pretty foolproof.”

“Good. If I don’t want to do something, I’ll be honest with you. Please remember that. And then after we talk, we can work whatever it is out. Cooperation, not compromise.”

Sebastian nodded. “I’m excited. Other than driving between Westerville, Columbus, and Lima, I’ve not really seen any rural parts of America. Some of the landscape in New England might be similar to Ohio. We’re going to Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and upstate New York.”

“Sam and I have never seen the ocean, so I am definitely excited about that. We’ve both been to the Smoky Mountains, but it was a long time ago for me. I’m not sure when Sam went. This trip should be fun. Are you already packed is that why you’re watching me?”

“I got home a couple of hours ago. And yes, I already packed. I made dinner already too. Where’s Sam?”

“He had to stop by the co-up to pick up a few things.”

“I’ll go turn the oven down to warm.” Sebastian came back a couple of minutes later.
“I think I’ve got everything, except what I can’t pack until after I shower tonight.”

“Well, as soon as he gets here, we can eat and head to Costco so we can prep everything before we go to sleep.”

They took off at 7:00 the next morning and headed to Boston. They drove along the coast through Connecticut and Rhode Island, stopping at places along the way, both places Sebastian had found ahead of time and places that just looked interesting.

They made it to Boston about an hour before sundown and went to Castle Island and walked around. Afterwards, they went to Sullivan’s for dinner. They each ordered a different seafood dish and shared them.

As they all got back into the truck, Kurt said, “So, this place was really good and the island was cool to explore. And I loved all the places we stopped up the coastline. What’s next, oh masterful vacation planner?”

“We’re going to the motel first to check in and get ready.”

“Get ready for what?”

“We’re going out to a dance club.”

“I didn’t bring anything suitable for a dance club.”

“I packed a suitable outfit for you in my bag,” Sam said. “And I grabbed your make up bag too after you left the room this morning.”

“Thanks. If you brought my make up, I’m assuming this is a gay-friendly place?”

“I did the planning didn’t I?”

Kurt stuck his tongue out and then tickled Sebastian.

“Hey!”

“I’m all for tickle wrestling matches, but not while we’re in the truck.”

“Sorry, Dad,” Kurt sassed.

“You better be.”

It didn’t take long before they got to the motel. They took their bags inside. They found the ice machine and poured the water out of the ziplock bags and refilled them with ice and put them back in the cooler bag to keep their food cold.

“I thought we might take a nap and then go. It doesn’t open until 10:00 and I have early morning plans for us. Plus, both of you wake up at like 5:30 or 6:00 anyway.”

“That’s fine with me,” Sam said. He pulled his shoes off and lay down on the bed closest to the door.

Kurt walked around the bed, took his shoes off, set his phone alarm, and lay down as well. Sebastian followed suit. He took his shoes off, flipped the lamp between the beds off, and lay
down on the other bed.

When Kurt’s phone alarm went off, they got up and got ready.

They arrived at Machine not long after the doors opened. They paid their cover charges and Kurt went to the bar and ordered a single shot of Grey Goose. Sebastian ordered a Fireball. Sam abstained, being both underage and the designated driver.

“Ready?” Kurt asked.

“Almost. We’ll be right there,” Sam said. After Kurt had moved a few steps from the bar, Sam said, “Whatever you think you know about how Kurt can dance is wrong. Try to keep your eyes from popping out of their sockets. Let’s go.”

Sebastian followed Sam out onto the dance floor. Sam found Kurt fairly quickly and started dancing nearby. By the time Sebastian caught up, Kurt already had a group of men gathering around vying for his attention, but he was ignoring all of them. When he saw Sam approach, he moved and started to dance with Sam.

A few minutes later, Sebastian worked his way in between them and turned Kurt so they were facing the same direction, back to chest. Kurt kept right on dancing and moving his hips in mesmerizing ways. Sebastian was in for an evening of pleasant torture. Kurt danced his way away from Sebastian and toward another guy.

It didn’t take long for Sam to move in and take Kurt back from the guy. Sebastian laughed. Sam didn’t seem interested in letting anyone put their hands on Kurt. Protective brother mode seemed to have been activated. Kurt danced away from Sam and Sebastian kept up the game. Within three minutes or so, he moved in to take Kurt again. Kurt smirked at him and shook his head, laughing a little and started to dance with Sebastian again. Sam had attracted a new partner.

Sebastian and Sam kept their game up the whole time they were at the club, never letting any one guy dance with Kurt for more than the length of a song. Sebastian saw Kurt heading for the restrooms and he followed him, but actually got through the crowd more quickly and headed into a stall. Kurt came in and was followed by a good-looking burly guy a little taller than Kurt.

“Hey, hot stuff, why don’t you ditch those twinks you’ve been dancing with and let a real man show you a good time?”

“No, thanks. Not interested.”

The guy moved closer and tried to put his hand on Kurt’s hip. “You’d look mighty nice swiveling that ass while riding me.”

Kurt stepped aside and kept the man from touching him. “I said no. I meant no.”

“Don’t be like that. I’ll make it good for you. I live nearby.” The man grabbed for Kurt’s wrist.

Kurt moved swiftly and grabbed the guy’s wrist instead and caught him off guard. He moved and positioned himself behind the man and used his knee to shove the guy off balance into the wall and pulled his arm up behind him. “I’ve said no twice. This is the final time before you’re sorry that you tried my patience. I’m NOT interested. The answer is NO. Do you understand?”

The guy nodded.
“I’m going to let you go, but if you reach for me again, you will find out what a football feels like when I kick it from 40 yards to score.”

Sam came in the bathroom door as Kurt let the man go. “You okay?”

“I’m fine. This man was making a choice between walking away or me demonstrating my football kicking technique.”

Sam winced. “I guess that will have to do since you left your sai swords at home.”

The guy high-tailed it out of the restroom.

Sebastian came out of the stall laughing. “That was awesome!”

Kurt stood at the sink and washed his hand five times. He finally dried them. “Well, after ending up in the hospital last year, I had one of the stage combat instructors teach me how to pin a guy bigger than me and give me self-defense lessons. And I worked on acting like I’m not afraid.”

“Well, it paid off.”

“If it hadn’t, he’d be on the floor wailing right now. I’ve seen the videos of Kurt as the kicker. Dude made the right choice to walk away.”

“I want to see the videos and the sai swords.”

“Maybe some day,” Kurt teased and winked at him. “Let’s go back out and dance, but I need some water first.”

The next morning, Sebastian got them up at 5:30 and they got dressed. They left after grabbing a coffee and paying their bill in the motel office. Sam drove them out to Short Beach following Sebastian’s directions. They parked and walked down the street a bit, crossed the highway, and walked down the ramp to the beach. They made it in time to watch the sunrise. They took a group picture and a bunch of other photos.

Once the sun was all the way up, they walked along the beach for a while. The most they dared to do was touch the water with their hands since it was so cold outside, but it was beautiful and they enjoyed their walk.

After they got back to the truck, they pulled their breakfast out and sat at a picnic table near the parking lot to eat. It was so cold out that they ate quickly at got back in the truck.

“This was a great idea. It’s beautiful. I’d love to come back some time when it’s warm enough to wade in the water,” Kurt said.

“Maybe we can sometime,” Sebastian responded.

Sam started the truck and Sebastian gave him directions to their next point of interest.

They drove down to the harbor and walked around for a little while. Afterwards, they started on a mini-tour of Boston that Sebastian had found online called the Freedom Trail. They went and walked through the historic areas before anything actually opened that morning.
By the time they had finished the walking tour around 10:00, places started to open. They visited Paul Revere’s House and King’s Chapel. Afterwards, they stopped at the truck for a much-needed break and moved it to Boston Public Gardens and ate lunch. They walked around the park for a little while before they headed to Faneuil Hall Marketplace, where Kurt found a couple of vintage, or maybe antique, pins he just had to have.

About 4:00, they started their journey to Vermont. They wanted to do the driving during the daytime, not only because navigating unfamiliar areas in the daylight would be easier, but because part of the point of the trip was to actually see landscape and scenery of the upper Atlantic states. They arrived in Rutland, Vermont just after dark. They found their motel, unloaded, repacked the food with fresh ice, and ate dinner. By the time they had all showered, it was nearly 9:00.

They all decided to go to bed early since they had only gotten about three hours of sleep the previous night.

By the time they were up, dressed, repacked, and had eaten breakfast, it was 8:30. Sebastian told them about where they were headed as the exited the motel office.

“I picked this town after looking through a lot of places because over a hundred buildings are on the National Historic Registry. There are lots of cool things to see here that are specifically unique to the East Coast region.”

“You win the prize for the most thorough road trip planner,” Kurt said.

“Coming from you, that’s high praise indeed. Thank you. Let’s go see if this place is as cool as it looked online.”

Kurt said, “The inside of that theatre was AMAZING. Even though it’s not my field of expertise at all, I think that working on restoring something like that would be really cool.”

Sam said, “I think it would be too.”

“And the gardens and the trails are really nice. I bet they’re beautiful once everything starts to bloom, and the buildings were definitely interesting to see. I wonder how the people here feel about gay men. THIS it the type of small town I could actually see myself living in. This is nothing like Lima. It’s like half the population of Lima with actual things to do that are cool.”

“You can add it to your potential places to live or retire or something,” Sebastian said. “It really is a cool place for the size.”

Sam pulled out onto the highway and headed for their next destination. They talked about the past few days of things they’d seen for quite a while, then the topic switched as they got closer to the Adirondacks.

As the entered the Adirondacks, Sebastian said, “One fun fact I learned while planning our trip is that the Adirondacks area is larger than the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, and Yosemite National Parks combined.”

“I had no idea,” Kurt said.

“Me neither.”
Sebastian continued to regale them with details about the region while they drove for an hour through the mountainous region before they got to Saranac Lake.

Sam said, “Okay, Rutland was cool, but this place looks like we’ve been transported somewhere else starting like an hour ago, but now that we’re in the middle and we can see lakes and mountains and everything, it feels like we’re in Europe or somewhere far, far away. This is beautiful. I could spend every day painting something new.”

“And we’re probably here at the least striking time of the year from what I read,” Sebastian said. “We’re too far north for the trees to have started to bud and the pictures I saw from the fall and winter were fabulous.”

“Well, the least pretty time of year looks amazing to me,” Kurt said.

They got out of the truck and just stood looking around for a few minutes. Eventually, they picked up their bags and headed to the office to pick up the key to their room. They had arrived about an hour before complete darkness to make sure they didn’t end up driving through the area in the dark, which gave them some time to look around a bit. They managed to get some really nice sunset photos with the mountains in the background. They took a walk around the area.

Sam said, “Bringing our food with us is the most economical decision, but I am in the mood for something hot. It is freezing.”

Sebastian looked around, “The sign in front of that place says it sells hot chocolate. Let’s go there.”

They all headed in the direction of the small shop.

“I’m just glad that it’s been warm enough during the day to melt the snow so the drive wasn’t awful. It could still snow, but the forecast is for the upper 30s and lower 40s during the daytime tomorrow.”

Kurt said, “It’s definitely different than when I went to the Smoky Mountains in the summer with my dad a long time ago. There were no snowcaps or anything like there still are here.”

“It’s gorgeous,” Sam said. “I’m taking lots of pictures tomorrow.”

Tuesday morning they got up early to start on their hike that Sebastian had planned for them. They ate what they brought with them and added some fruit and coffee from the free breakfast offered at their motel.

“Are we ready?” Sebastian asked.

Sam and Kurt nodded.

“This is one of the easy hikes for the area. Due to the time of year, we can’t go up into the mountains because although the highway was clear of snow the mountains that aren’t snow-covered are very muddy and hiking is discouraged due to the damage that hikers inadvertently cause by walking along the edge of the trails to avoid the mud and it damages the natural flora and causes a lot of erosion.”

“Someone studied the travel guide very carefully,” Sam teased.

Kurt wrapped his arm around Sebastian’s waist as he started walking toward the area where they
would start their hike from. “He’s very thorough, which I appreciate.”

Sebastian smiled. “I think it would be really cool to come back here in the summer sometime. The photos from the Azure Mountain Fire Tower and some of the other places are really amazing.”

“I can imagine. The view from here is beautiful.”

They were back by the time the stores in the downtown area started to open. They took their time wandering through different art galleries and shops. They had brought their lunch with them, so when they were ready to eat, they found a place they could sit in a small park-like area on the edge of a lake.

After lunch, they ventured across the street to the bakery they could see from where they had been sitting to splurge on dessert. They each ordered one item and took them back across the street and split them three ways.

Sam said, “I like it here. It’s calm and relaxing, but there’s a lot to do it seems.”

“I picked up one of the visitor guides and it looks like they have an active live theater community here, which seems unusual for a small town, but so did the place we went in Vermont. Maybe my view of small towns is warped. Or maybe these two places are just unusual. But I’m thinking that maybe I wouldn’t hate living in a small town as much as I thought I would. I would just need to find the right small town.”

Sebastian said, “When I looked for places to visit, I chose the places that looked the most interesting, so I would guess that a lot of places are more like Lima and the small towns you’re used to. But I think you’re right. There are nice small towns.” He stood up. “Ready to look around and see more of the area before we head out?”

“Definitely,” Sam said.

Around 3:00, they headed back to the truck and started their journey continuing west through the Adirondacks. They stopped at a few places along the way and pulled over to enjoy the views and take more photos. A couple of hours later, they had driven out of the Adirondacks and Sam started talking.

“So,” Sam paused, trying to get his thoughts together. “Sebastian planned this next stop and two others by my request.”

“Oh,” Kurt said.

“After Isabelle saw my paintings when she came over before Christmas, she got Sebastian to send her a good photo of them. She showed to the people I work for in the art and layout department. They asked me to make a few paintings for a photo shoot, which I did. Charlotte took me aside not long after that and convinced me to apply to art schools. I was honest with her and told her about my grades and terrible SAT scores. She encouraged me to apply anyway and said that the admissions team will sometimes overlook grades and test scores in adult returning students. So, she helped me with the applications and she and Marcus wrote recommendation letters. I still had photos some of my artwork from high school and we included photos of my newer stuff. I sent the applications in, and after spending a lot of time talking to one of the SUNY admissions offices in the City, I got the New York state residency issue settled, so I’m eligible for in-state tuition.”

“I didn’t think you wanted to go to college.”

“I’m not sure that I do. That’s why I asked Sebastian to add the three SUNY campuses that I
applied to as part of our road trip. I want to see the art departments and talk to some students. The art programs are very different from regular liberal arts degrees. Most of the classes are actually art classes, like studio work. It’s not a lot of math and science or traditional ‘school’ subjects.”

“So, you applied for this coming fall?”

“I did. I’ll get the acceptance or rejection letters in early April. I’ve been doing more than go-fer work at Vogue. After Charlotte took an interest in my work, she began having me hang around for some of the layout and design sessions. She had me do some mock-ups during lunches. She seems to think I have an aptitude for it. She encouraged me to look into graphic design as well as fine arts programs.”

“So, we’re going to visit the three campuses?”

“Yeah. One tomorrow, and then two on Friday. I’m not sure what we’re doing in between. The rest is still a surprise for me as well.”

“Okay.”

“I don’t even know how I can afford in-state tuition, but I figured now was the best time to give it a shot. If I’m not good enough to get in, nothing changes really since I never had my heart set on going, but if I get in and I like the area, I’ll probably give it a shot. I’m only going to have the Vogue job for a few more months and I can work at a coffee shop pretty much anywhere. I have liked being in the City more this time than I did the last time. I like living with the two of you and it’s a lot less stressful than the loft. Being with Mercedes was nice of course. But living closer to Central Park has helped and finding that art co-op has made a big difference. But I still don’t love it in the City. It’s just not what I want long term.”

“Well, maybe you’ll like the schools and you’ll get into one and like it. If you don’t, you’ll still have the same options you have now.”

“Right.”

“So, where are the three schools?”

“Potsdam, New Paltz, and Purchase. Potsdam is where we’re going now. New Paltz is about an hour and a half north of New York City. Purchase is about 40 minutes northeast, not far from the Connecticut/New York State line.”

“Well, this area has been absolutely gorgeous. I can see the appeal of going to an art school in an area with such beautiful landscape nearby. It would be easy to find a muse in nature here. Is one program better than the others?”

“That’s what I’m hoping to figure out by spending a couple of hours each place. I know it’s not long, but it has to be better than just reading about the programs and the classes online.”

“That’s one thing I wish I had done – actually gone on college visits. I have learned a lot at NYADA, but I know there are other schools that I could have gone to, but I never looked into any of them. College planning at McKinley was non-existent. Mr. Schue and Miss Pillsbury were talking to people the spring of senior year, which was way too late except for schools with rolling enrollment.”

“Didn’t you do the college and career sessions at Dalton as a junior when you were there?” Sebastian asked.
“No."

“That’s weird. Everyone had to take it. It wasn’t for credit, but was required. We had to meet with
the guidance counselor and go over the packets and research we had to do.”

“Maybe since I was a mid-semester, well actually three-quarters of the way through first semester
transfer, they decided I already had enough to do or maybe it just never dawned on anyone to give
me the packet or whatever and sign me up for the guidance counselor sessions. I had four weeks to
cover a whole semester’s worth of information. I barely had time to breathe. But the sessions would
have been helpful, I’m sure. I should have done my own research though. I knew better than to
believe that McKinley was properly preparing us for anything.”

They continued to talk as Sam drove the rest of the way to Potsdam. Once they got there, Sebastian
gave him directions to their motel. They got their key and took their stuff to the room.

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For the first time during their vacation week, no one set an alarm. Kurt had woken up at 6:00, but
had quietly gotten out of bed and sat in the chair and opened Spotify, and listened to one of his
favorite stations while he wrote a fairly long email to Mercedes and attached a few pictures from
their trip so far. They were doing better at keeping in contact with each other than they had been
before. She was enjoying her tour and they were looking forward to seeing each other in May when
she was going to be in New Jersey. She had already sent tickets and a backstage pass for them.

He wrote Dave a short email, attempting to be supportive like he said he would be all those years
ago, but hadn’t done back then. After their initial contact back when Kurt was still in DC, he had
sent Dave links to the videos that he had found helpful about getting through break ups. They
never shared details about their relationships with Blaine, but Kurt knew enough to know that
Dave had been serious about Blaine because that’s what he was looking for at this point in his life.
He had been through the ‘hook-up phase’ as he had called it, and while he wasn’t embarrassed
about it, he was ready to find someone special and he thought he had. Neither of them discussed
Blaine or what had happened. After the first few emails they exchanged, they emailed each other
once or twice a month.

He looked over at the beds and smiled. Sam had really done a 180 and was completely back to
being himself again. No more ditzy, spaced-out Sam that was only concerned with his looks. He
took care of himself, but his looks weren’t what he focused on now. He seemed to BE himself
again, which was the important part. Sebastian had been a wild card and a big risk, but he was glad
that he had stepped out on the limb and moved in with him. Living with Sebastian was easy, just
like Kurt had told him it was. The transformation from jackass to one of Kurt’s best friends had
been surprising, a really good surprise.

Sam and Sebastian slept in until 8:00. Once they were awake, everyone got ready. They drove to
the SUNY Potsdam campus and met up with an art student who gave them a tour of campus and
the art department. Sebastian and Kurt walked along behind Sam and the tour guide, looking
around and listening to the two of them talk.

A couple of hours later, they left campus and drove around the town looking at the area. They
parked downtown and walked around for a bit just to get a feel for the people. After they ate lunch,
Sebastian directed Kurt out of town and back through the Adirondacks heading southeast.

They spent the rest of the day driving and stopping as they journeyed through the mountains. They
stopped at Tupper Lake, Blue Mountain Lake, and Great Sacandaga Lake as well as several other
places to enjoy the view and take photos.
Five hours later, they emerged on the south edge of the Adirondacks. Kurt and Sam switched places and he continued to drive the rest of the way to the cabin in the Catskills that Sebastian had booked. After driving another couple of hours, they arrived just before dusk. They were all ready to get out of the truck and stretch. They grabbed their stuff and headed to the cabin.

“Oh, wow. This is nice,” Sam said as they went in.

“Yeah, we’re staying here the next two nights. No more cold food for a couple of days.”

“It has a nice kitchen.” Kurt walked across the room and looked out the kitchen window. “There’s a lake out back.”

“And there’s a pontoon boat we get to use, so tomorrow we’re going out on the lake. Tomorrow we just get to relax. I’ve loved the road trip part, but I thought we’d need a break for a while from being in the truck so much.”

“We can hike around here too, right?” Sam asked.

“Definitely,” Sebastian answered.

“Sounds good,” Kurt said. “I’m going to start on warming up our dinner. I could bake the apples instead of us eating them raw, but they’d taste better with cinnamon.” Kurt started looking through the cabinets. “Ooh. Spices. Nice. Baked apples it is then.”

Sebastian put a bag on the counter and pulled what was in it out and put it in the refrigerator.

Kurt turned to look and smiled. “I see. At the last gas station, you bought a dozen eggs, and some milk. Mmm.” He turned to Sam, who had started to prep the apples. “Make an extra one and I’ll use it to make cinnamon apple pancakes for breakfast.”

“Got it.”

It didn’t take long and the sandwiches were toasted. They took them to the table and sat and ate together. Once they were finished and had cleaned up, Sebastian pulled out a deck of cards and pack of Uno and Rook cards.

“Oh. You thought of everything.” Kurt grabbed for the deck of Uno cards.

They spent all day Thursday enjoying the area around the cabin. They went hiking for a while after breakfast. When they came back, they sat out and enjoyed the sun sitting in the deck chairs that overlooked the lake. Sam ended up sketching while Kurt and Sebastian read the books they had brought with them.

They ate lunch outside and went for another short walk around the other side of the lake before they went out on the paddleboats. When they got back, the flopped into the chairs again to rest.

“Relaxing is very tiring,” Sam teased.

“When we have to power our own boats, it is,” Kurt agreed. “I think I need to start riding my bike again.”

“It’s warm enough now,” Sebastian said.

“I’m going to go set up and paint for a while.”
“I’ve never tried to do a plein air painting and I’ve seen listings for competitions. There’s a decent amount of money to be won. I’m going to see if I’m any good at it.”

“You’re not going far are you?” Kurt asked.

“Nope. I’m just going to go down past the dock area and face west so the sun is shining on the area I’m painting. I’m going to give myself four hours, which is a little less than the competitions give usually, but I don’t have a lot more time than that for full light today.” He went in and grabbed the stuff he had picked up at the co-op before they left and headed down to the lake to set up.

Kurt and Sebastian spent the afternoon talking and reading out on the deck. Once Sam came back, he showed them his painting.

“Oh, wow. That’s amazing!” Sebastian said surprised. “I didn’t really expect much in four hours, but that’s really good.”

“I think for a competition, I would paint on a larger canvas since I would get more time. I just wanted to see if I could plan something out and actually start and finish it in an allotted time period.”

Kurt said, “Well, you succeeded. It’s beautiful.”

“It really is,” Sebastian agreed.

“Thanks. It turned out better than I had expected. I might give one of those contests a try at some point.”

“I’d like to go see one,” Kurt said. “If you find one that I can go to, I’d love to go with you. I think it would be really interesting to see the results from something like that.”

“Me too.”

Kurt said, “If you can find one on a Saturday, we could do that one Saturday instead of playing New York City tourist.”

“I’ll see what I can find. I’m going to go wash up. Are you two ready to eat?”

“We’ll follow you and we can get started on warming up dinner,” Kurt said.

They worked together and 15 minutes later, they were back outside enjoying the sunset as they ate on the deck. They all ended up taking photos and the set Sebastian’s camera up and used the timer to take a few photos of them with the sun setting in the background.

The next morning, Kurt used the chopped up raw veggies he had put back the night before and some of the cheese they had brought for sandwiches, along with the eggs they still had to make veggie omelettes for breakfast. Sam and Sebastian were drawn out of the bedroom by the smell.

“You spoil both of us,” Sam said.

Kurt just smiled and put their plates in front of them at the table. He poured them all cups of coffee and served them they way they liked. He sat down with a glass of water for himself since he drank his coffee while he had been cooking.

“So, a little more boating or hiking before we leave?” Sebastian asked.
“Boating I think,” Kurt said.

Sam agreed.

They cleaned up, got ready, and packed their stuff back in the truck before they went back and spent an hour paddling around the lake again. Sam drove and they stopped a few places along the way like they had been. A couple of hours later, they were in New Paltz.

They spent a couple of hours with a student tour guide and Sam got to see the campus and the department. He asked mostly the same questions he had when they were in Potsdam. They left campus and drove around the area for a while. They found a park and ate lunch before they drove to SUNY Purchase where they repeated what they had done earlier that morning. They drove around the Purchase campus area for a while before Kurt drove the 45 minutes back to their apartment in Manhattan.

When they got back to the apartment, Kurt started a load of laundry. Sam and Sebastian put away the few snacks they still had and started dinner. Kurt went in to help them.

“Did seeing the schools help you decide?”

“I’m not sure yet. It did help me see that I might be able to complete the programs. All of the schools have disability services to help dyslexic students. So, I think I could make it through the few regular type of college classes that I would have to take. That makes me feel better. I got booklets and all of those papers that I got at each place that I want to look through too. It’s tough though because I really liked the area around the Adirondacks the best, but it’s so far from here that I couldn’t visit easily and you’d have to rent a car to come see me. Purchase is the most convenient because you can take public transportation there. It would take longer than driving, but it’s doable. New Paltz would still require you to rent a car to come visit. I loved the Adirondacks area, but I’m not sure that I’m ready to just wing it and not know anyone and be so far away. I’ll have to see if I even get into any of the programs too.”

“I didn’t realize that there was public transportation available to the Purchase area,” Kurt said.

“And I wouldn’t have to give up my job at the Copper Cup right away. It’s a 45-minute drive. I could drive here on Friday afternoon or evening and still work my regular weekend shifts. It would make me feel less tense about money knowing that if I didn’t find a job right away, I’d still have the one I already have.”

Sebastian said, “That’s an interesting option. I wouldn’t mind. I’m not planning on renting out your half of the bed.”

Kurt snorted. “I hope not.”

Sebastian laughed.

A little over two weeks later, Sebastian was startled when he opened the door and saw Kurt sitting in the corner the sofa with his legs extended out in front of him, as still as a statue. “Why aren’t you at work? How long have you been sitting there?”

Kurt didn’t respond. Sebastian put his bag down and hung his jacket up. He walked closer to Kurt and saw that he was completely zoned out. Once he was closer, he realized that Kurt had ear buds
in. He stayed put and called Kurt’s name a little louder.

“Kurt.”

Kurt pressed something on his phone, but didn’t move otherwise.

“How long have you been sitting here? Why aren’t you at work?”

“That depends on what time it is and I’m not at work because I melted down after I left the retirement home. I was in tears and I couldn’t face going into Vogue. I texted Isabelle and told her I was unwell, which is pretty much the truth. I sort of got myself together and went back to NYADA for a while. And then I cam here about 4:00.”

“It’s 5:00 now.”

“Oh.” Kurt pulled the earbuds out and wrapped them around his fingers.

“So, what’s going on?”

“We are starting the work on the songs this week. Up to this point, we’ve been working on the dialogue and the staging and choreography, what little there is. And we’ve just been doing that using the demos I made with me singing the songs. It was just for placement and practice. I thought that it would familiarize them with the lyrics without putting the pressure of learning to do two things at once. Anyway, that was going fine. Last Friday, Frankie bailed on me at the last minute. He was my pianist. He was supposed to come in this week and next week to hash through the parts and then we’d start using the tracks I’ve made once everyone knew the songs. So, one of the staff members at the center heard me getting aggravated with Frankie on the phone when I was in the hallway last Friday when I was on my way out of the building. She told me to give her a few minutes because she might have a solution. I just leaned against the wall and did my best to calm down. She came back a few minutes later and told me that she had talked to a nice young man that came in once a week who played the piano for the residents for fun. She said he agreed to come in for the two weeks that I needed someone. So, this morning, I get there at 11:00 and guess who the nice young man is.”

“Blaine.”

“Bingo. When he sat down at the piano, several of the ladies in the group started talking to him. And of course, they all think he’s wonderful. I went to NYADA and asked every person I could find that plays the piano if they would help me. I couldn’t find a single person who could.”

“Why did Frankie bail?”

“He got a small role in an off-off-Broadway show Friday morning and it’s already in rehearsals during the time I go to the retirement center. He hadn’t been cast the first time around, but that person that had been cast quit and the director called Frankie. I can’t change my rehearsal times and neither can he. Things like this happen, but the icing on my day was when one of the ladies accidentally bumped her coffee and it dumped on my binder. So, now my copy of the script is covered in coffee. I dried it up using paper towels, but it’s going to have to be reprinted before I can work with it tomorrow. And in my hurry to attempt to save my binder from the coffee, I banged my ankle into the table leg hard enough that it’s bruised and a little swollen and I have a dance midterm critique tomorrow morning.”

“Just tell Cassie.”
Kurt didn’t say anything.

“Which ankle?”

“Right.”

Sebastian knelt and pulled Kurt’s sock down a bit. “It is kind of swollen. I’m going to get an ice pack and after that, I have this ankle support you can wear.”

“You don’t have to wait on me. I can get up and do that.”

“I know you can. Just let me, okay?”

“Alright.”

Sebastian came back with the ice pack wrapped in towel. He cuffed Kurt’s pant leg, took Kurt’s sock off the rest of the way, and put the ice pack on Kurt’s ankle.

“I didn’t know you had a tattoo.”

“I had it done after Finn died. Rachel and I went out after we came back to New York from the memorial. I thought about it for a while and one of Finn’s favorite performances of mine was in class one day, he got up and sang Sammy Davis Jr.’s ‘I’ve Gotta Be Me’ and Mike danced with him. He worked so hard on that choreography and he sounded amazing, but his footwork was still comical. I always smile when I think of him that day. And he had finally found what he wanted to do. So, it’s part of that song with music notes intertwined around the lyrics. I figured of all of the places on my body that I could see that would probably never been seen on stage, it would be the side of my foot since I would almost always have some type of foot covering on.”

“That makes sense.”

“I have one on my other foot too.” Kurt slipped his other sock off and held his foot so that Sebastian could see it.

“That’s from ‘Climb Every Mountain’."

“It is. That one’s for my mom. The Sound of Music was her favorite musical and became mine because she watched it frequently when she didn’t feel well. It became my go-to movie as well. When I was young, she oftentimes sang ‘Climb Every Mountain’ to me after she tucked me into bed. She had a beautiful voice. I had her sing it for me once and I recorded it with my little kiddie tape recorder with the microphone, like the one in Toy Story. I transferred it from the cassette it was on to a digital file as soon as I learned that it was possible. I keep it on my phone for really bad days. I was listening to it when you came in.”

“Well, I think both of the tattoos are really cool.”

“Thanks. Blaine hated them. He always wanted me to wear socks after he saw them. He commented about how they were inappropriate and distracting and how actors shouldn’t have any and how they made people look like tramps and stuff. I tried to ignore him and just wear socks or slippers or whatever.”

“I’ll be right back.” Sebastian got up and went in his bedroom. Kurt heard him open and close his dresser and come back. He sat back down next to Kurt and pulled Kurt’s foot up onto his lap. He wrapped Kurt’s ankle carefully. “There. The swelling and bruising is higher than the slip-on ankle brace I have.”
“Yeah, mine too. Thanks for wrapping it.”

“You’re welcome. What can I do to help you with your coffee-soaked script?”

“You could take my flash drive to the copy shop down the street and get a new one printed.”

“Sure.”

“I didn’t have the flash drive with me when I was out or I could have done it on the way home. I don’t take my laptop unless I have to because I’m already carrying so much other stuff around.”

Sebastian got up again and went and grabbed Kurt’s laptop and went in his own room and grabbed a blank flash drive before he went back to the living room. “Copy what you want printed onto this. I use it only for printing stuff. That way the copy place never has the chance to mess up any of my other files and if it gets lost while I’m out, it only has one or two things and not the originals.”

“That’s a good idea.” Kurt turned the laptop on and waited. “I don’t know if I can cope with having Blaine there for two weeks. Several of the ladies are already fond of him. They’ll associate him with my musical and talk to him about it if they aren’t already, which they probably are since there’s nothing else exciting going on around there.” Kurt took the flash drive and plugged it in and put of a copy of the script on it. After he ejected it, he powered the computer back down.

Sebastian took the flash drive and put it in his pocket. He took Kurt’s laptop back to his room. When he came out, he said, “I’ll go get this printed and come right back. Three-hole punch the edges, right?”

“Yes, please. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

While Sebastian was gone, Isabelle texted him. He took a photo of his wrapped ankle and texted it back. She called him.

“What happened to you?”

“I’ll live. I just have a dance exam in the morning and I need to stay off of it for now. Sebastian iced it and wrapped it for me.”

“Good.”

“I’ll be in tomorrow. I’ll just have it wrapped if it’s still hurting.”

“Keep it elevated and ice it.”

“I will.”

They hung up. Kurt readjusted and got a little more comfortable and tried to relax. A half-hour later, Sebastian was back with the script.

“Alright, now what?” he asked.

“Now, I need to get the coffee soaked notes out of the binder, clean it and put the clean script in, but the problem is that I can’t just toss the coffee-soaked ones because they have today’s notes on them. Fortunately, there weren’t that many, but I’ll need to copy them onto the clean script.”
They worked together and an half-hour later, Kurt had a nice clean copy of the script in a clean binder with the day’s notes written in and he was putting the post-it notes on the correct pages to add those notes in. Sebastian started dinner while Kurt continued to work. Kurt started to hum softly.

“You can sing, you know. Everything I ever said about your voice in high school was a lie. I thought you sounded good then. I just said the opposite. Please, sing if you feel like it. If it ever bothers me, I’ll say so politely.”

Kurt laughed. He started to sing “Climb Every Mountain”. Once that finished, he sang “Defying Gravity”. He put the binder back in his bag and went back into the living room and sat on the end of the sofa near the bookcase so he could see Sebastian in the kitchen and he started to sing “I’ve Gotta Be Me”.

“That one I could totally tap dance to.”

“I’m sure you could and it would look great.”

“Doesn’t Adam play the piano well enough to do what you need?”

“He does. I didn’t think to ask him because I went back to NYADA when I didn’t go to work. I asked around campus. He’s very busy, but since it’s for a short period of time, he might be able to do it.” Kurt pulled his phone out. “Could we add something to dinner to make it enough for four people, if he’s even free?”

“Yeah, I’m sure we can. Find out if he can be here at 7:00.”

Kurt texted Adam and waited for a response. “He says he’ll leave now and come straight here and he’ll bring a loaf of the French bread you like from the bakery near his place.”

“He’s my favorite Brit.”

Sam opened the door as Kurt laughed and said, “He’s a sweetheart.”

“Why thank you, honey.” Sam winked at Kurt.

“You goof! You’re a sweetheart too, but I was referring to Adam, who is on his way over to have dinner with us and he’s bringing Sebastian’s favorite French bread.”

“I see. Sounds good. I like that French bread too. You are planning to share it, right?”

“Maybe a little,” Sebastian teased.

“I’m going to go change. Wait. Why are you sitting like that on the couch? Is that an ace wrap on your ankle? How did you get hurt?”

“Long story with three parts, none of them good. Adam is hopefully the turning point in the story so it doesn’t end in tragedy.”

“Very cryptic and not very helpful as far as answers go. I’m going to change and then you’re going to explain what that meant.”

By the time Sam had changed, Adam was knocking on the door. Sam opened it and let him in. “Good evening, fine sir.”

“And to you.” He bowed and grinned. He shut and locked the door. He turned to greet Kurt. “What
“Happened to you, love?”

“He told me that it was a three-part story, none of them good. And that’s all I’ve gotten out of him so far.”

“I see.” He slipped his shoes off and walked over to the sofa. He sat down and pulled Kurt’s feet gently into his lap and stared massaging his left foot. “So, love, tell us how this happened. Oh, I like the tattoo. That’s new.”

“I got it after Finn died. That one is for my mom. The one on my other foot is for Finn.”

“Where are you hurt?”

Kurt pointed.

After Adam saw that it wasn’t his foot that was injured, he reached for the ace wrap and rolled it back enough to see what the other tattoo looked like. “I like that one too.”

Kurt told him about Finn’s performance.

“So, love, tell us the three-part story.”

“First, I need to ask you a question. Are you busy between 11:15 and 1:15 on weekdays? I mean you probably are, but it would only be for this week and next week.”

“Let me look.” He moved a little and pulled his phone out. “Well, this week, I couldn’t do Thursday. Next week, Wednesday wouldn’t work, but I might be able to change that one. Now, tell me why you’re asking me and tell us the three-part story.”

Kurt told Sam and Adam what had happened.

“I am definitely your new pianist. I will see what I can do about Thursday, but don’t get your hopes up, but I will fix next Wednesday.”

“Really?” Kurt practically squealed. “Oh, my God. Thank you! I will make you whatever you want for breakfast, lunch, or dinner this Saturday and next Saturday too, if you want to come over.”

“You don’t have to cook for me, but I won’t turn down your offer. I’ll have to think though. I’ve liked everything you’ve made. I’m not sure what to choose.”

“Flatterer.”

“No, seriously. You’re a good cook. It’s a tough choice.” Adam went back to massaging Kurt’s foot.

Kurt moaned. “That feels so good. Thank you.”

“So, which one of you gets to tell Blaine to bugger off?”

“I think that would be me,” Sam said.

“I deleted his contact info out of my phone when I blocked his number and removed his ability to track me.”

Sam texted Blaine and told him that Kurt had found a new pianist and that his help was no longer needed and reblocked him. “Done.”
“Sebastian fixed all of the rest of the things that went wrong. He was super helpful. So, my binder is coffee free and the script is in it and all I need to do is add the notes from today later. After we eat, I’ll play the songs for you and you can run through them if you want, so it won’t be pure sight reading tomorrow.”

“That will work fine, love. I’m glad I can help. Do neither of you play piano?”

“Guitar,” Sam said. “But I work all day, even if I did play piano.”

“I used to play the cello. I haven’t since I left Paris. Dinner’s ready.”

Adam let Kurt get up first. He went and washed his hands before he sat down to eat. Sam was right behind him to do the same.

“Thanks for doing all of the work, Sebastian,” Kurt said. “It looks great.”

After they finished eating, Kurt took Adam in the bedroom to play the music for him. Sebastian and Sam cleaned up.

“Do you think I could go to the co-op with you tonight? I’d really like to see it.”

“Sure. I should have asked you if you wanted to go, but you’re always so serious with your studies, I never feel like I should bother you.”

“I am serious, too serious sometimes, but I have time this evening, if that’s okay.”

“Sure. We can leave whenever you’re ready.”

“Now’s good. Lead the way.”

“These are fun, love. The last thing I read that you wrote was that great Pippa Middleton musical. Whatever happened with that?”

“You’re the only one that ever really found it funny. I pretty much abandoned it, but it’s gotten a revival this semester because I’m so short on time, I’m using it for my script-writing course. I’m editing it here and there and turning it in bit by bit. The hardest part is that I still don’t have the melody for the songs. I’m just hitting a wall. I think I’m just too stressed most of the time to relax enough to come up with something. These songs were easy because I didn’t compose new music. I’ve just rewritten the lyrics to fit the show, like the way people do when they’re horsing around. Since the whole thing is supposed to be live and real, it works because very few people can spontaneously create a whole song, but lots of people take melodies they know and make up new silly lyrics to them.”

“Well, I think these are fun. I don’t know of any way for you to have more free time, but if you need a partner in relaxation, just let me know. I’m sure Sam or Sebastian would join in. Maybe you just need some old fashioned fun, like charades and Twister or Pictionary. Maybe card games. Spoons does a lot for taking your mind off of anything except passing cards fast and grabbing for spoons.”

Kurt laughed. I haven’t played spoons in forever. But maybe you’re right. I need a break. I had a great time over spring break two weeks ago and if I could have stayed in any of those places for a
few weeks and actually had time to relax and reread my script, maybe I could have come up with something.”

“Maybe start with the chorus. I know you’ve heard that before, but try it.”

“Thank you for coming over tonight.”

“You’re welcome, love. Do you need to ice your ankle again?”

“Probably. Let’s go back in the living room and watch something. Or do you need to go?”

“No. I’m good to stay, if it’s okay with you.”

“Of course. I’m going to grab my binder and get today’s notes transferred while we watch.”

Sam and Sebastian came back not long after the movie Kurt and Adam were watching had ended. They came in and Adam was sitting on the couch, reading something on his phone and Kurt was asleep.

Sam walked over to the sofa and gently woke Kurt up.

“Oh, you’re back. I didn’t mean to fall asleep, Adam. I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine. It’s been a long day, but if you get up and go to bed, I can make the sofa up and sleep myself,” he teased. “Off with you.”

Kurt smiled and got up. He went to shower and straight to bed. Adam headed into Sebastian’s bathroom to change. Sam brought out the bedding and left it for Adam in the alcove. He grabbed it on his way out of Sebastian’s room and took it to the living room and went to sleep.

Kurt was pleasantly surprised the next morning when he realized that his leg was bruised, but he hadn’t actually sprained or pulled anything that prevented him from dancing.

His second surprise of the day was that Blaine did not show up at the retirement home and insist on helping, which calmed him down significantly. Adam was a great help and everyone loved him.

Thursday of that week, Sam got letters from all three SUNY locations. After dinner, he opened them with Kurt and Sebastian.

“I can’t believe I got accepted to all three schools. And Potsdam and Purchase both offered me a small scholarship, which is probably enough to cover the cost of my books and supplies.”

Kurt reached over and put his hand on Sam’s. “You’re really good. Now, you just have to figure out where you actually want to go and if you really want to go.”

“That’s the hard part.”

“Changing directions is always hard.”

Sebastian said, “I think it’s great and you know we’ll support you, no matter what choice you
“Have you told your parents?” Kurt asked.

“No, I didn’t want to get their hopes up. Once I make up my mind, I’m going to tell them.”

The two weeks of rehearsals with Adam had gone well and they were able to move to using the backing tracks for the songs by the end of the two weeks.

That Friday evening, Kurt, Sebastian, and Sam went to Adam’s apartment with the rest of the Apples and Adam’s other friends. Kurt had arranged a surprise party for Adam. Adam’s roommate let all of them in and they were packed into the living room pretty tight, with people sitting on the floor and standing around the room, waiting for Adam to get there. He thought that he was having dinner and a movie marathon at Kurt’s, so he had come back to change and pick up his overnight bag.

He unlocked the door and opened it, turning back to lock it and put his bag on the shelf. He turned back around to hear more than 20 people say “Surprise!”

He jumped, but not terribly. He had a huge smile on his face. “Well, thank you all for coming. And I am definitely surprised.”

Kurt walked up to him and said, “We’re not going to stay here. This was just our meeting place to surprise you.” He stepped closer. “Bring your bag still. We’re still having the movie marathon at our place.”

“I’ll be ready in just a sec. I’m going to change quickly. I can meet all of you outside.”

Everyone, except Kurt, left and went downstairs and headed to Central Park picking up the pizzas and drinks along the way.

“Happy Birthday.” He stepped forward and hugged him. “I’ll wait here for you.”

A few minutes later, Adam was back with his bag over his shoulder. Kurt opened the door and Adam locked it. He wrapped his arm around Kurt’s shoulders. “Thank you, love. I know this was all your doing.”

“I wanted you to have a good time on your birthday. You do so many nice things for so many people. And you made time in your busy schedule to help me with my pianist crisis. Everybody loves you and we’re getting pizza to celebrate.”

“Helping you was my pleasure entirely.”

“You’re always such a sweetheart. I appreciate you helping me. I can’t believe that opening night is a week from tonight. I’m nervous and excited. I’ve had fun and don’t want it to end, but I want it to be over with. It makes no sense, I know.”

“It does. I think you love working with the people there, but the stress of it being for a grade is what makes you ready for it to be over with. You want the school-related part of it to end.”

“That’s true. I had thought about continuing to go, but I think I will take a break for a little while. I
need to focus the last two weeks on being prepared for my spring critiques. I don’t want to wash out because I don’t appear to be focused on my performances.”

“I don’t think Madame Tibideaux would do that.”

“I don’t have enough confidence to believe that. Maybe next week if the performance goes smoothly, I’ll feel more confident. How did your audition go this afternoon?”

“I’m not going to get a callback for the part. There were a couple of guys there that were definitely better suited for the part with more believable southern accents. I’ve gotten to where I can do pretty much all of the American type accents, except for that. For a play where I don’t have a lot of monologues I would be okay. I could practice each line until I could say it the right way, but this character has a lot of speaking parts where he talks for a long period of time. It’s just not really something I can do well.”

“Are you auditioning for anything else?”

“I have a couple of things in the next few weeks, but I also have a potential offer to pick up one of my plays at a theater in London. Not on the West End, but a venue is a venue. I have to start somewhere.”

“Well, Mr. Crawford, I should definitely get you to autograph one of your headshots for me, so I can prove that I knew you BEFORE you were famous.”

Adam hip checked Kurt and rolled his eyes. “I’m the one who will need an autographed photo of you.”

Kurt shook his head. “I don’t know if I’m even going to try at this point. I’m worn out. I don’t think I can keep this pace up next year. I need to either give up the idea of performing and focus in on the costume design aspect of the theater or I’m going to have to figure out a way to change my hours or get a different job. I just can’t keep working afternoons and early evenings and have any chance at being in any type of production.”

“That’s true. Could you work mornings instead?”

“I’m not even sure. Morning means starting at about 9:00. If I do that, I won’t get off until 1:00. I don’t see how that would improve much since I would just have to try to get all of my classes set up for the afternoons and I don’t see how that would work since most of the dance classes are in the mornings.”

“I don’t know either, love, but I’d hate for you to give up on performing. When I said you were breathtaking, I meant that. Watching you perform is … it’s like time stops and I’m transported.”

Kurt blushed. By then they were close enough that they could see where everyone was. They joined the group and Adam grabbed a slice of pizza and started to mingle and talk to everyone.

The next week flew by quickly and it was opening night at the Lexington Home. Madame Tibideaux was there, seated with Isabelle. A few of the Apples showed up and sat with Adam, Sam, and Sebastian. And despite the fact that Kurt had made his point clear, Blaine was in the audience as well. Fortunately, Kurt managed to completely ignore him.

After the performance ended, there was a small reception. The main actors were seated at a banquet table signing the playbills that Kurt had made for the event. Kurt posed for a few photos
with them, and took quite a few of his own. They were back in their element, enjoying every minute of the attention they were getting. Kurt smiled.

Madame Tibideaux approached him from behind and he did not see her walk up. She spoke quietly. “Well done, Kurt. That was quite amusing and your stars clearly enjoyed the experience.” She walked away as quietly as she had approached.

Sam was the next to sneak up on him, but as successfully as Madame Tibideaux had. “That was great. Everybody loved it.”

Kurt turned toward Sam. “Thank you. You helped this happen. Without you, I wouldn’t have had the strength to walk away and come back on my own.” He wrapped his arm around Sam’s waist.

“You did a good job,” Sebastian said as he came up on Kurt’s other side.

Kurt reached out and wrapped his arm around Sebastian’s waist as well. “Thanks.”

Adam came towards them. “Everyone loved it.”

“I’m glad. Look at them. They’re having a great time signing autographs.”

Adam smiled. “This gave them something to do and look forward to.”

“Well, they have one more performance tomorrow afternoon. I hope people show up. There was a good turn out tonight.”

“I think there will be. Some of them have to have family that couldn’t make it here by the time it started, but who will come tomorrow since it’s a Saturday.”

“I hope so. Let’s go get something to drink.”

Kurt spent Saturday evening working on the reflection part of his internship project. He wanted to complete it while everything was fresh in his mind. He stayed in his room until he finished it, even skipping dinner. Once he finally finished, he shut his computer down, took a shower, and got in bed. He felt like a weight had been lifted.

He thought about what he still had left. He had a week to practice and prepare for the performances, but he also had the MET Gala to help prepare for.

He survived the MET Gala preparations the week before the event. That weekend, they went to the Central Park Zoo since it was finally warm. They packed a picnic lunch and enjoyed the weather. They took a walk around the lake before they went their separate ways that afternoon.

Kurt and Sebastian spent all day Sunday studying and practicing. Sam went back to Central Park to paint.

That following Monday evening, Kurt had the most amazing evening spending his time looking at everyone’s clothing at the MET Gala. It was intriguing to see what the attendees did with the China Through the Looking Glass theme.

Two days later, it was Sam’s 21st birthday and although he had been out to bars numerous times
when he had lived in the City the first time, he hadn’t been out since then. Kurt, Sebastian, and Adam went with him and they met up with some of Sam’s friends from the coffee shop and the co-op at a club and spent the evening dancing, but they didn’t stay out very late because they all had work and classes the next day.

Kurt had his dance and vocal spring critiques that Thursday and Friday.

That Saturday was Sam’s day to work a double shift. Sebastian spent the whole day studying. Kurt spent the entire day finishing up his costume for his final project. When he finished, he put it on and asked Sebastian to photograph him from every possible angle so he could be absolutely certain that it fit properly before he declared the project complete. After he studied all of the photographs, he decided that there was nothing else he could do to make any improvements and he packed it up in a garment bag to take with him to NYADA Monday morning.

Once it was in the bag, he plopped face down on the bed and just lay there. Sebastian heard the plopped and looked into Kurt’s room.

“Are you okay?”

“Mmff.”

“I see. Why don’t you take a nice hot shower and I’ll make us some tea?”

Kurt flopped onto his back. “That would require me to stand up.”

Sebastian laughed at him. “How many exams do you have?”

“None, technically. I have to turn that costume in tomorrow and model it. And then, I have consultations with my professors where they go over my performances and share their critiques face to face.”

“Ooh. I’d rather take an exam.”

“Yeah, me too sometimes. My performances have already been graded, but I have to sit and listen to everything I messed up in great detail all while looking like I’m taking all of the criticism in stride, while appearing duly chastised yet determined to learn from my mistakes. What about you?”

“I have the same setup as last semester. A couple of exams each day, and just one on Wednesday.”

“Anything on Friday?”

“Nope.”

“Friday morning, you and I are going to do something crazy. I don’t know what yet, but I’ll think of something.”

“Deal, but nothing we can get in trouble for.”

“Of course not. I didn’t work this hard to end up in jail.”

Sebastian laughed.

Adam met Kurt for lunch Monday. They sat at a picnic bench in Central Park and ate.
“How did your evaluation go?”

“It went well. Professor Shelton liked my costume. She examined it carefully before she had me put it on and model it. She went over the fit very meticulously. I didn’t get anything marked down. She gave positive comments on my color and fabric choice. I got an A. It’s sort of a let down though. I put so much work into it. I wish we had some type of show or just a time where we all got to see the costumes that were designed. It seems like that would be a part of the course.”

“It should be. I think you should mention that to Madame Tibideaux at your meeting Thursday.”

“I’ll think about it. What did you find out?”

“The theater in London has made an offer. I’m going to go ahead and take it. I love it here, but I can’t just let the momentum of my education die. I went back and worked for a while and I loved it, but I’ve not gotten any parts here and I don’t just want to stick around and let this opportunity pass me by. It might not lead to anything after its initial run, but maybe it will. If it doesn’t, I can apply for a visa and come back for a while and try again auditioning for roles here. At least I’ll come back with some money to keep myself in an apartment while I audition.”

“That makes sense. I’m going to miss you though.”

“Me too. I’m glad we’ve gotten the opportunity to get to know each other and be friends again though.”

“When are you leaving?”

“June 1st.”

Kurt nodded. “We’re still going to Coney Island the last Saturday in May though, right?”

“Definitely.”

Kurt started to talk about the things he wanted to do there in an effort to take his mind off the fact that Adam was leaving soon.

Thursday afternoon’s appointment with Madame Tibideaux had finally arrived. Kurt waited outside her office until his name was called. He approached the door and knocked gently as he opened it. He closed it quietly behind him. She was busy looking at something on her desk, and he sat down and waited for her to finish.

“Mr. Hummel. It’s good to see you this afternoon.”

“And you, Madame Tibideaux.”

“Your internship project was quite the hit. The retirement center was thrilled and the actors obviously had a fantastic time participating. Your other evaluations and exams were quite strong as well. I believe you have managed to pull off another semester of all A’s young man. That’s impressive.”

“Thank you.”

“I will relieve you of the worry that you will be washed out of the program. You will definitely be returning in the fall.”
“Thank you.”

“I know that you have enrolled in a class for the summer, but I am going to ask you to reconsider and instead take advantage of an opportunity that has been presented to me.” She picked up the paper she had been looking at when he came in and handed it to him. “I’d like you to participate in this. The universities in this area with drama programs have been asked to send a few of their best students to participate in this. It will take place at Barnard College. It’s a new program, so I have no way of assigning you a letter grade for participating, but I do have the ability to create a 3-credit independent study course that will be graded on a pass/fail grade. If you participate, you pass. I would like to recommend you as one of NYADA’s participants.”

“Wow. Thank you. Can I look this over really quickly?”

“Sure. I’m going to look over your courses for the fall.”

A few minutes later, Kurt had finished. “This looks really interesting. I’d love to do it.”

“Excellent. I’ll send your information to the program director. He’ll be in contact by tomorrow, I’m sure. The courses you have chosen for the fall are fine. I do expect you to audition for the fall play and the spring musical next year.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Was there anything else?”

“I just wanted to make one small suggestion about the advanced costuming design course.”

“You know I have no control over that course.”

“I’m aware. But I thought perhaps there might be some way for the students to have some type of show of their work in the future – even if it’s just in class. I think it would encourage creativity and some camaraderie. We spend a lot of time working on our projects on our own, whereas the dance and vocal classes spend time working together as a group.”

“Interesting idea. I’ll pass it along.”

“Thank you. And thank you for recommending me for this summer course.”

She nodded and went back to reading something on her computer.

He put the information in his bag and left.

Friday morning after Sam left for work, Kurt and Sebastian left.

“Where are we going?”

“You know it’s a surprise. Stop asking.”

“Fine.”

When they got off the subway, Kurt took Sebastian’s hand and led him through the crowded terminal and when they got up to the sidewalk, he let go. Sebastian followed behind him and when Kurt stopped, Sebastian looked up.
“A cheese shop?”

“Yep. An American cheese shop. I know how much you love French cheese, so I thought we’d go out and be crazy and try like every type of American cheese this place sells. Maybe you’ll find a new favorite. And if not, it will be fun. Come on.” Kurt pulled the door open and motioned for Sebastian to go inside.

“This is not what I expected.”

Kurt laughed and followed him inside the store.
Chapter 20

After they got back from the cheese shop, Kurt sat down next to Sebastian on the sofa. Sebastian took a deep breath and called his father at the time he had scheduled.

“Hello, Sebastian. Why is it that you needed to speak to me?”

“I am calling to request that you return my social security card, my birth certificate, and my US Passport to me.”

“You know that you will get those back on your birthday next month.”

“I need them sooner than that. I would like to get a job this summer. I am taking one course, but I have too much free time on my hands and I would rather spend it working than being idle.”

“You could take more classes.”

“I could, but I would rather work this summer. I have done as you have asked all this time. I know that I could have gotten duplicates of those documents on my own since I am adult. I could have gone behind your back and done that, but I did not. I am requesting that you return them to me. Please send them certified overnight.”

“Fine, Sebastian. I will send them to you. I expect a copy of your grade report soon.”

“I will send it as soon as I am able to access it, as always.”

The line went dead.

“I would have thought that proper phone etiquette would be part of learning to be a lawyer.”

“I think that’s only taught to those training to be law clerks or secretaries.”

Kurt rolled his eyes. “At least he said yes.”

“He only said yes because he knew I already had the upper hand. When he realized that I knew that I could have gotten them and that I could go ahead and do it now, he knew he had nothing to hold over my head anymore, plus it’s so close to my birthday now, that I’m sure he just doesn’t see any point in fussing over it.”

“So, you’re going to take Miss July up on her offer?”

“Definitely. I know she’s a pain to a lot of people, but I really like dancing and getting paid to do it is the perfect job, plus she’s nice to me.”

Kurt smiled. “Of course she is. You’re a great dancer and you two work well together.”

“So when does the acting camp start?”

“Not for three weeks. It can’t start until the week after high schools get out, but the training is the week before. So, I’ll get one extra week of summer break at the beginning of the summer. During the training, I’ll find out which group I’m in. I’ll get experience and credit, plus it seems like a lot of fun, which I can definitely use more of. And I’ll get a week break during the first week of July. And then three extra weeks off at the end compared to taking a regular summer class. Credits with less stress, no papers, no tests, and no critiques.”
“Sounds good. I signed up for an 8-week course. I decided I’d rather do more work in a shorter period of time and have a break. And the dance sessions at NYADA are only for the first 8 weeks anyway.”

“Planning a vacation?”

“I don’t know. I could. It will be really different. Being able to do whatever I want. The first thing I need to do is reinvest my trust fund, but Isabelle has already gotten me an appointment with her financial planner the day after my birthday.”

“Very helpful.”

“She is. She’s, well, you know. She’s more like an aunt.”

“Where would you go if you took a vacation?”

“I don’t honestly know. I guess I’ve never really thought about it. Of course, there’s always the ‘Oh, wouldn’t it be cool to go there?’ thoughts whenever I see pictures of beautiful places. But I’ve never really given a lot of thought to actually traveling anywhere other than places around France. I always wanted to go travel around and see the southern coast, the mountains, Alsace, Mont St. Michel, the castles in the Loire Valley. High-speed trains make travel much easier. I mean I used to think about going to Spain once I was out of high school to see the Moorish architecture. I’m not religious, but the Sagrada Familia basilica looked like it would be amazing to see. But all of those things are the types of trips that I would want to have time to enjoy. I liked our road trip at spring break, but that was a driving trip. I think I’d want a vacation to be a little more relaxing, like staying in Saranac Lake for a whole week or even in that cabin, but that’s the kind of thing it seems like would be more enjoyable to do with someone. A vacation by myself – I don’t know.”

“I’d like to go to Europe. I agree about the amazing architecture in Spain, and France too. I’d like to go to Ireland and Italy and the Netherlands. And non-European places like Macchu Picchu and an island. All these amazing photos I’ve seen of different places – I’d like to go to visit all of them.”

“You still have to work today, right?”

“Mmm hmm. At 2:00, like usual. I’ll have to change and leave by 1:00 to make sure I’m not late.”

“I’m going to go with you and get Isabelle to let me raid the vault. And I’m going to go shopping.”

“Without me?” Kurt pouted quite dramatically.

Sebastian laughed. “Not THAT kind of shopping. I need some new dance shoes. I want to get them broken in before classes start again. And I want to get a couple of pairs of dance shorts, I think. Cassie said it gets hot in the dance studio in the summer.”

“It does. All those windows let the sunlight in all day and combined with the fact that the room is huge, the air conditioning doesn’t quite succeed in its job.”

“Then I definitely need to get some shorts. And probably some new trainers because I doubt there are in any the vault, but we’ll see. I’ve about worn the soles off the bottoms of mine.”

“Lunch then and we can go together?”

Sebastian nodded and got up.
Once they were all seated at the table for dinner, Sam said, “I made my decision and sent my acceptance letter in this afternoon.”

“Where did you decide on?” Kurt asked.

“Purchase. I loved the Potsdam area, but I’m not ready to be that far away from everything. If I’m in Purchase, I can come see you two and if I need help, maybe one of you can help me at first. It might seem childish, but I’m actually really nervous. Not about moving somewhere, but about moving somewhere to go to school. If I were just going to get a job and live somewhere, I’d see what I could find to do in Saranac Lake or maybe the Lake Placid area since I really loved those areas. But to go to school so far away from, well, from you two – I’m just not ready for that. I talked to both schools and I can transfer to Potsdam after a successful semester at Purchase or even at the end of the school year. The first year classes are pretty similar and so, if it goes well, I could still go to Potsdam next spring or next fall if I decide that I want to.”

“That’s a nice option,” Sebastian said. “And of course, we’ll help you if we can.”

“I understand why you’re so concerned. You should have gotten help in high school, but you didn’t. I can understand why you’re leery of believing the school about helping you.”

“You helped me in school more than any of the teachers ever did.”

Kurt nodded. “So, you’ll be going in August?”

“Actually, there’s a program to help returning students be prepared for college and it starts in a couple of weeks. I have to enroll by Sunday before midnight, if I’m going to attend. It seems pretty cool. It’s freshman English, math and a study skills course. It’s supposed to help you start wherever you are and then finish the material by the end of the 12-week session. It’s like 6 hours a day. I’d get 9 credit hours and I’d have the English and math requirement out of the way, which seems like a really good deal. Smaller class, people more like me, and instructors trained to help people get caught up.”

Sebastian said, “That sounds like a good idea, but you seem hesitant.”

“Well, I could still work weekends, but it’s unlikely that I could work during the week with that many hours a day in class. I don’t really make enough working at the coffee shop to afford to rent a place on my own. They have some housing options. I just need to look at them again before I decide.”

“You could look and see if there’s a shared housing listing on Craig’s List for that area. There are probably students who are still looking for someone to sublet their places for the summer.”

“I’ll do that after we eat. I could drive there Sunday and look at a few places if there are any that look reasonable.”

“We can go with you,” Kurt said.

“Yeah. No schoolwork this weekend.”

“Okay. It seems like a really good idea. I’m going to see if I can get more weekend hours at the coffee shop. I’ll see if I can work two shifts on Sundays and still work two shifts every other Saturday – at least for the summer. That would make me less stressed about the money. What have you two decided?”
Kurt talked about the theater camp and Sebastian told Sam about working with Cassie. By the time they finished eating and washing the dishes, Adam had arrived and they started their traditional Doctor Who marathon.

Saturday, Sam spent the day as their guide to all things Central Park. They went to the waterfall, the castle, the rock that overlooked the baseball fields, the gardens, the lake, and pretty much everywhere in between.

When they were walking through the park late in the afternoon, Kurt saw someone having his photo taken in his graduation cap and gown.

“One more year,” Kurt said. As they approached the area where the graduate was standing, Kurt looked more closely. He stopped. “Give me a minute.” He walked even closer. “Elliott?” asked excitedly.

“Kurt!”

“I haven’t seen you in ages. It looks like congratulations are in order.”

“Thanks?” Elliott looked confused.

Kurt stepped closer and spoke quietly, not understanding Elliott’s reaction to him. “Is something wrong?”

“I need to finish this. We can talk in like 15 minutes if you want. I’ll meet you down by the Peter Pan statue.”

“Sure.” Kurt turned back and walked back to where Sam, Sebastian, and Adam were waiting. “I need to talk to him. I’ll catch up with the three of you after I finish. He said he’ll be done in 15 minutes.”

Sam said, “That’s fine. Just call one of us when you’re done and we’ll meet up.”

Kurt walked toward the Peter Pan sculpture and sat along the stone wall waiting for Elliott. When he walked up, Kurt got up and asked, “Do you want to sit here or walk or what?”

“We can walk.” He moved away from the statue and Kurt followed him.

“Are you okay? I haven’t seen you in like a year and a half.”

“I know. It’s been a long time. I’ve missed you.” Elliott opened his arms and Kurt stepped forward to hug him.

“So, you just graduated. Congratulations.”

“Thanks? I assumed that Blaine told you. I see him a couple times a week at NYU – well, saw him. He had a voice class that was just down the hall from mine.”

“I haven’t heard from you or anything about you in a year and a half, not long before I ended up in the hospital. Last I heard was that you were going on a yoga retreat and you’d get in contact when you came back. I haven’t heard from you since then.”
“When were you in the hospital?”

“A year ago December.”

“I’m so confused. I sent you a text and told you that I wasn’t going to be able to be in the band for a while because I had to go back to New Jersey because my mom had an accident. So, I wasn’t even in the City for that next semester. You said you were too busy to keep up with the band anyway and that you’d get in touch if and when you decided to try it again. I came back last summer and took classes to catch up since I had only done two online classes spring semester.”

“Will you show me the texts?”

“Sure.” Elliott took his phone out, found the texts, and handed it to Kurt.

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To Kurt: I’m sorry to do this via text, but I have to go back to New Jersey for a while.

From Kurt: No problem. I’m too busy to focus on the band right now anyway. I’ll let you know if/when I have time to get back into it.

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“That’s from when I was in the hospital or maybe right after I had gotten out. I didn’t write that text.”

“Let me think. Blaine said you said you went back to Ohio last summer. Then you stayed in Ohio to do your internship, but then you changed your mind at midterm when it wasn’t working out. You got married. Blaine switched to NYU. Like I said, I’ve seen him a few times in the hallway before class. He told me about you doing your internship at a retirement home and how much fun the old people were. He showed me pictures. He said you were crazy busy, like so busy that you didn’t ever leave your apartment except to go to classes, to the retirement home, and then to Vogue. That you literally ate lunch while walking from the retirement home to your job and that read assignments during dinner and did schoolwork until you went to sleep. Something like you were gone at 6:30 in the morning and didn’t come home until 7:00 and you went to sleep at 10:00 so you’d get 7.5 hours of sleep a night.”

“I don’t even know what to say. Some of that is true, well I guess a lot of that is true.”

“Okay. I’ll go first. We goofed around in the guitar shop that day singing, which was a lot of fun. After that, we talked about putting off more rehearsals until winter break started because you were super busy.”

“Right. I was preparing for my first mid-winter critique and I was still taking extra classes to get caught up from starting a semester late.”

“Then, my mom got in an accident and I talked to the school and I skipped the last two weeks of class and got my exams combined into two days. I didn’t really tell anyone what happened. I didn’t want to talk about it at the time. I stayed in New Jersey, took two classes online during the spring semester. I came back in May to start the summer session. I’ve been here ever since.”

“How’s your mom?”

“Oh, she’s fine now. She had to have a few surgeries, but once she recovered from those, she’s been doing fine.”
“That’s good.”

“You said something about you being in the hospital.”

“Yeah.” Kurt explained to Elliott what had happened.

“Oh, my God. Kurt that’s awful. I would have totally come to see you if I had known.”

“Thanks.”

“I’m still really confused. That looked like Sam you were with when you saw me. And two people I don’t know. I thought Sam was Blaine’s bestie. Skip that for now. So, if you never saw that text, what did you think happened?”

“Blaine moved out that same week that you and I had gone to the music store and he went to talk to you. There was a lot of drama after that day in the music store. I got hurt a couple of weeks later. I had a concussion and was on strong painkillers. Blaine said that you had gone a yoga retreat. Or maybe Rachel did. Anyhow someone said you had gone a yoga retreat. I honestly don’t remember. I don’t have amnesia, but some of the things that went on are a little fuzzy because I was unconscious for a while, but I could hear some things that were said in the hospital room. Rachel dropped out of NYADA not long after that. Anyway, none of that matters. All I knew was that you weren’t around and I was told that you were at a yoga retreat. I should have made more of an effort. I went home for Christmas. Blaine and Sam stayed here with Mercedes. The new semester started and he was in 6 of my classes. I had almost caught up and I was taking second semester sophomore classes, but somehow he got special permission to be in 6 of 8 of my classes. I got asked to sing at the dance hall reopening late in the spring and I asked him to sing with me, but the benefactor liked him better and he got a showcase out of it and he lied to me. We lived apart for nearly 6 months. He moved back into the loft when Rachel left for California. He washed out of NYADA, I broke up with him, he went back to Ohio, I stayed here, but I was so lonely after everyone was gone that I ended up going back to Ohio to work with Rachel to try to revive the Glee club at our old school.”

“And you and Blaine got back together and got married and came back to New York in November. He’s been at NYU and you’re still at NYADA. And Rachel’s new show is opening next week.”

“Have you seen Rachel?”

“No. Blaine told me about her show. She and I weren’t on the best of terms even before I went back to New Jersey. That little ‘Gloria’ number she did at the diner back in the late spring trying to put me on the spot pretty much sealed that, but you know that.”

“So, you seem to have been told mostly the correct information. Here are the parts where what you were told deviates from what actually happened. You were gone, Dani’s roller derby team kept her too busy to work on the band, so I didn’t do anything to reach out to you because I figured you were busy and I was trying to juggle too much as it was. I’m sorry that you became a casualty of that. You and Adam were the only two friends that I made after I came here. Sure, I was friendly with Dani, but she was Santana’s girlfriend, not really my close friend. I had lost Adam before I met you, so you were literally the only non-Lima friend that I still had. But more of the Lima crew came in and pulled my attention away from my own goals. Mercedes came to New York. That’s who Sam and Blaine moved in with. I know you haven’t met, but adding her and Sam getting back together into the mix of Funny Girl drama, Santana and Dani, Santana working on a song with Mercedes for her album, me and my issues with Blaine, and me still taking two extra classes while still paying half of everything at the loft and working all the time… my own personal time just didn’t exist. It was literally like living in a fire station and being the one everyone on fire ran to.”
Elliott nodded. "I can see that. You have the most dramatic friends I have ever met. Everything is a crisis and just from one round of ‘Gloria’ and being pulled between them and being asked to choose, I don’t see how you kept your sanity."

"Oh, and this sweet old lady came into the diner wanting to hang up a poster for the musical she was performing in at her retirement home. She took me and sat down with me and was the first person to treat me like I was a real person in a long time. I told her that I had somehow ended up as the mom in a Nora Ephron movie with no life of my own. She got me to come watch them rehearse and I ended up playing Peter in their Peter Pan production. It was so much fun. It was the first week I had enjoyed since we were at the music store that day, actually. It was the first time I had performed just for the joy of it in all that time."

"It sounds like you had a good time. I’m assuming that’s where you did your internship."

"Yes."

"When Blaine told me that you were super focused on your studies without Lima interference after you came back here late last fall. I felt happy for you. You were finally getting some peace and quiet it seemed. I didn’t try to reinsert myself in your life because you had cut everyone out. I figured that you had finally had enough and you just needed your space."

Kurt nodded. "Let me going on from where I was. So, to recap what happened after the last time I saw you. Blaine and Sam moved out and moved in with Mercedes, who was here from LA to work on her album. Sam and Mercedes got back together. Blaine managed to finagle his way into all second-year classes with me. Despite it only being three of us in the loft, it was still the center of all things dramatic. Rachel debuted on Funny Girl to rave reviews. She got what she had always wanted, and then bailed when offered a TV show, which bombed. You said you thought I went to Ohio for the summer. I did not. After Blaine moved back into the loft when Rachel left for LA, he and I still couldn’t make it work. We fought constantly. I broke off the engagement."

"Say what?"

"Yes. I broke off the engagement and he left. He went back to Ohio alone. He started dating my biggest high school bully, who had apologized, but still… Anyway, they started dating and when I went back to Ohio at the beginning of September, they had moved in together. I did not know that they had been dating when I went back with the intention of winning him back. I dropped it outwardly when I saw that he was living with someone else, but I still wanted him back. A lot of absolutely insane things happened. Mid-to-late October, Blaine kissed me, cheating on the guy he was living with and went home and broke it off with him. I took him back, and a few days later, I was talked into marrying him in a joint ceremony with Santana and Brittany. I forgot that part. They got back together a year ago, so they’d been back together for five months. Anyway, Blaine and I participated in the ceremony, but did not have a marriage license."

"So, you weren’t officially married."

"Right. We walked in by walking the two of them down the aisle and everyone was surprised. Sam and Mercedes kidnapped us when we were drunk at the end of reception and took us to separate hotels. I learned a lot of things I didn’t know and realized a lot of things that I hadn’t realized before. I went to Lima, got my stuff, drove with Sam to DC, and stayed a few weeks with my parents. Then we came back here and we are living with the dark-haired guy you saw with me."

"So, you and Blaine aren’t together?"

"No. Kurt paused to think about it. “In the last year, we were together for about four days.”"
“Okay…”

“So, currently I live with Sam and Sebastian in a two-bedroom apartment on the Upper West Side. Sebastian attends Columbia and I did know him in Lima. He transferred into the private school where I met Blaine the fall after I had transferred back to McKinley, so he and I never actually went to the school at the same time, but we have a lot of mutual acquaintances from having attended the same school a year apart. Sam and I share a room. Sebastian has his own. It’s his apartment. He’s gay. He does know who you are. He’s seen the Pamela Landsbury and the One Three Hill videos. The other guy I was walking with is Adam. He’s been here this last year on a playwriting fellowship at Juilliard, but he’s going back to England in a couple of weeks. I am single. I know all of this is a lot to wrap your mind around so quickly –that everything you’ve thought was true was actually fact mixed with fiction. But if you want, I would be more than glad to show you where I live and you can talk to Sam and hear the whole thing from him if you want. You can meet Sebastian and Adam, who can tell you about what’s gone on since I came back last November. I don’t want you to automatically assume that I’m the one telling the truth.”

“I do believe you, but I’d love to come over.”

“You’re not angry with me?”

“Kurt, stop walking. Look at me.”

Kurt stopped and turned towards Elliott.

“I’m frustrated. I loved singing with you. I told you the truth that day in the diner. Joining an indie band was one my big goals for living in the City. I was thrilled when you accepted me. I loved being your friend. Am I mad that I missed out on that for the last year and a half? Yes, of course. Did you have way too many people pulling at you already? Most definitely. Am I mad at Blaine? I’m not sure whether to be angry or seriously concerned. Either way, he and I were never friends. I don’t care what he does or doesn’t do. The only reason I even spoke to him was in hopes of seeing you. But now, he can be completely out of the picture. I’ve graduated and I won’t run into him in the hallway before or after class.” Elliott pulled Kurt into a hug and held him. “I missed you.”

“I’m sorry.”

Elliott stepped back and looked Kurt in the eyes. “I forgive you. You’ve been under more pressure than any one person I’ve ever met with so many people demanding your attention. So, the part about you not having anything to do with the people in Lima is true?”

“More or less. Obviously, Sam and I live together. And I still correspond with Mercedes, mostly emails since she’s so busy with her music and her tour. She’s actually going to be here next weekend. Well, not here, but in Jersey City. And I write emails to one other person occasionally, but you’ve never met him. He’s never been here. My parents don’t live in Lima anymore. They moved to the Ohio side of Wheeling, West Virginia in December when my dad’s congressional term was over, so I have no reason to go back to Lima.”

“Does that offer of going to your place stand? We can meet back up with your friends if they’re okay with me tagging along.”

“Let me text Sam. I’m sure it’s fine.” Kurt pulled his phone out. “I just need to find out where they are. Today was our Central Park Tour by Sam day. Every other Saturday, the four of us play New York City tourist. When I first came, I had all of these places I wanted to go and things to see and I never got around to them because I was too busy to breathe. So, we’ve been doing this all semester. This is the 8th or 9th time. I’ve lost count.”
“So, you and Adam didn’t get back together? You said you’re single.”

“I started going to counseling when I came back. I’m finally feeling like a whole person on my own. My relationship with Blaine was really toxic, but it took being kidnapped by Sam and Mercedes for me to realize that.”

“I think that your relationships with pretty much everyone you were friends with were toxic. I saw you at the center of a Venn diagram as a circle where all of your friends were triangles converging to the point where they still had space that didn’t overlap with your circle, but they were almost to the point where there was barely any space left in the center of the circle that was yours alone.”

“That’s probably a pretty accurate assessment. I had no friends when I joined Glee Club, and other than you and Adam, I hadn’t really been close to anyone my age besides the friends I made in Glee. And deep down, I knew I was being walked on. Why else would I have been able to tell Maggie what had happened? I had a supporting role in everyone’s lives, but I had no role of my own anymore. But at the same time, I knew that walking away would leave me back where I had been, which was completely alone. And I know how that feels because when I broke it off with him last May, that’s exactly what I was – completely alone. And after a few months, I went running back after him. As far as I know, everyone besides Sam and Mercedes are still Team Blaine. I went on a social media blackout because I didn’t know what else to do. I came back and I had Sam and Isabelle, my boss at Vogue. Sebastian and I have become friends since then. He’s actually Isabelle’s second cousin. When we moved in with him, we didn’t really know him, but we needed a place to live and he had the space available.”

“I get it. There comes a point at which all you can do is hide until you work through things. And it seems that you’ve worked through them. I’ve never seen you this open and genuinely happy, even though we’re talking about unpleasant things. You were like this just briefly not long after we first worked out that I wasn’t trying to steal your band, but as Blaine became a bigger part of your life, you closed yourself off.”

“He was really jealous of you. You’re good looking, talented, and you wanted to be in my band. You thought I was talented. You paid attention to me. And he couldn’t stand that. Any situation involving me and Blaine always had to have Blaine as the most desired and I had to come in somewhere after him. That’s just the way it was.”

“Enough of him. I never liked him to start with. I just didn’t want to lose you. And then I did anyway, but now I’ve found you or you found me. Whatever. So, what are you doing this summer?”

“Madame Tibideaux asked me to work at a summer theatre camp for high school students at Barnard College. I guess a couple of students from each of the New York City colleges that have theatre departments will be participating.”

“No way! I got hired to be one of the counselors and live in the guys’ dorm for that camp. Which musical are you going to be part of?”

“I don’t know yet. All I know is that the training starts a week from Monday and that I’ll learn what I need to know then, according to the email I got from the director.”

“Well, there are two plays and two musicals. Are you working in the morning or afternoon?”

“Morning. I still have to work at Vogue in the afternoons. My role in the camp is unpaid.”

“Yeah, all of the college students are unpaid. Otherwise, they’d never be able to run a program like
this. I won’t get paid a lot, but free room and board means very little in the way of expenses for me for the summer.”

“That’s true. I know I’m working with a group doing a musical. The theatre majors are being assigned to the plays.”

“Right. So, it will either be Grease or Into the Woods.”

“Alright.”

“The high schoolers have already auditioned, so they already know their roles and have probably been preparing.”

“Mostly what I know is that it sounds like fun, which I am in desperate need of. I get three credits, which I had to take this summer. And best of all, I don’t have to pay for the credits, take any exams or write any papers. It’s perfect.”

Elliott laughed. “It will be a lot of fun getting to work together or at least see each other.”

“Please tell me that Blaine is not one of the music students from NYU that was asked to participate.”

“Only juniors were sought out. They provide the maximum amount of college training and experience, but are willing to participate without being paid because they get free credits for participating. No seniors would want to do it since they need to find real jobs and don’t need credits.”

“Makes sense. And I’m relieved to know that Blaine can’t participate. Come on. They’re right over there.” Kurt pointed. Kurt told Elliott about how Blaine was quietly invading his life all the time on the way over to meet the others.

“Sam, you remember Elliott.”

“Of course. Good to see you, man.” Sam hugged him.

“And this is Adam and Sebastian.”

“Nice to meet you,” Sebastian said.

Elliott nodded slightly. “You too.”

Adam reached out and offered his hand. “I thought the three of you were great as One Tree Hill.”

“Thanks, man.”

“I didn’t know you had heard us,” Kurt said.

“I came to hear you before I left for London.”

“You never told me.”

“Well, now you know. You three were great.”

“Thanks. So, now pizza? Chinese?”

“I thought we were cooking together,” Adam said.
“Well, we can still. I was going to make lasagna, but it’s not vegetarian. I could probably make an individual one for Elliott.”

“You don’t have to go to a lot of trouble just for me.”

“As long as you’ve not switched to being vegan, I’m fine.”

“Not vegan.”

“Alright, then. I should warn you though, it’s Monty Python night. Or we could do Sherlock or Downton Abbey.”

“Any of those is fine. We should let Adam pick. You said he’s going back to England soon.”

Adam said, “I’ll think about it.”

“Oh, God. I had forgotten what a good cook you are. This is so good,” Elliott said.

Kurt laughed. “I’m glad you like it.”

“I have a silly idea. I want each of to tell an embarrassing or funny story from when we were kids,” Kurt said. “I could really use some laughs.”

“Alright, then,” Adam said. “I’ll go first. Once when I was a wee lad, about 6, my mum had gone outside to work in the flowerbed and left me inside for quiet time. I was supposed to be entertaining myself with coloring or drawing quietly while I was in my room across the hall from my 2 year old cousin who had been put down for her nap. I saw little point in hanging around making sure a baby continued to sleep when I was certain that I knew how to make tea and biscuits all on my own. Of course, I wasn’t allowed to use the stove, but our teakettle was electric and plugged directly into the wall and no one had ever specifically forbade me from plugging it in. I filled it with water and waited nearby so I could be certain to unplug it before it actually whistled because I didn’t want to wake my cousin up. So, I filled two cups with hot water and put the tea bags in. When they seemed done, I added a bit of sugar, and then I opened the refrigerator to get the milk out. I poured some in and I very carefully carried both cups to the table and put some biscuits on a plate. I opened the back door and my mum saw and came quickly thinking that I was alerting her that my cousin had awakened. But she saw that I had made tea and came in quietly. She washed her hands, sat down and took a drink and nearly choked. I had poured the kefir she had made in one of the milk bottles into the tea. At the time, it wasn’t funny and I cried because I thought she had burned her mouth or something. But she was sweet and asked me what I had put in the tea and comforted me that she hadn’t burnt her tongue. That was the last time she made kefir without marking the milk bottle.”

“I don’t even like milk in tea,” Sam said. “I can’t imagine how awful it would taste with kefir in it.”

“I had the sense not to try it after my mum choked like that,” Adam laughed.

“Okay, mine’s not funny like that, but it was embarrassing and I wasn’t really a kid. I was 16 and I wanted to get a tattoo, so I got someone to get me a fake ID. I had looked at it plenty of times on the way to the tattoo parlor. I got there and signed in and started looking around at the photos and samples, even though I had what I wanted drawn out on a paper in my pocket. My name was called and I went up. I had to give them my ID. He took it and looked at the sign-in sheet and told me to leave. I looked at him questioning why. He told me that I was either drunk or using a fake ID because I spelled my own name wrong.”
Sam asked, “Did you eventually get what you had wanted or did you change your mind by the time you turned 18?”

“I got what I wanted and I was still 16. I went to a different shop and made sure that I had memorized my fake name better the second time around.”

“How did you keep people from telling your mom or dad?”

“I had my first one done in a place that neither of them would see unless I was unconscious.”

Kurt waggled his eyebrows, “Do tell.”

“Fine, it’s on my hip, below my waist line, so it doesn’t show when I’m wearing clothes. I was studying French in high school and we had to read *The Little Prince*. The book just struck a nerve and just spoke to me. I have a small tattoo from the book.”

“I haven’t read that since I was a little kid. On ne voit bien qu’avec le coeur. L’essentiel est invisible pour les yeux.”

Elliott looked at Sebastian confused.

“I think we forgot to mention at some point that Sebastian is French,” Sam said.

Elliott nodded. “I didn’t have that quote tattooed. Please excuse my terrible pronunciation. I wasn’t great at it 6 years ago and I’m even worse now. It says, ‘C’est le temps que tu as perdu pour la rose qui fait ta rose importante.’ That’s tattooed along the edge of a single long-stem rose.”

Sebastian repeated the quote in English. “It’s the time you have lost for your rose that makes your rose important. Other people have translated it differently in different editions, but the author clearly used the word lost, not spent. Time isn’t really spent because we can’t get more of it and spend it again like we can money. We lose time every day. So, it’s the fact that the person lost time to cultivate the rose that makes the rose so important. Anyway, that’s a really cool quote to use in a tattoo. I like the ones Kurt has on his feet too.”

“You have tattoos on your feet?”

“I do. I’ll show you in a little bit. I know this was my idea, but I can’t really think of much of anything funny about my life, thus wanting to hear other people’s funny stories. I guess the funniest thing I can think of is when I came out to my dad, he told me that he had known since I was three and had asked for a pair of sensible heels for my birthday.”

“If he knew, why did you have to come out to him?” Adam asked.

“He wanted me to tell him myself. And his response was accepting, but in a resigned kind of way. Don’t get me wrong, he was supportive of me, but he would have rather have been supportive of a straight jock son. He and I struggled to find common ground. He went to musicals with me and endured my fashion shows. He was really great about it and never made me feel like less of a person. It was just hard for him. If my mom had been around, she would have been the perfect buffer. Explaining to him why I was doing what I was doing. Sort of like the narrator in one of those BBC documentaries. But without the interpreter, he got lost and we struggled with communication a lot. That was not the point of this endeavor. I wanted to hear funny stories and laugh, not dredge up why it’s hard to grow up gay in rural Ohio with a single parent mechanic.”

Sebastian closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “The most embarrassing thing I did unintentionally as a child was when I was in *Narnia the Musical*. I played several different roles
because I was a good dancer. I was a fox, one of the witch’s minions, and some other things. I ran off the stage from whatever number we had just finished and I changed into my scary costume again and ran out on the stage to perform again, only to realize that I was supposed to be in my fox costume. So, I sang and danced the whole happy number with woodland creatures while dressed in the wrong costume. It was mortifying because everyone noticed, and of course laughed.”

Sam said, “The only thing I can think of off-hand was when I was little, my girl cousins who were just a couple of years older than me taught me to play ‘Ring Around the Rosy’. Only I was young enough that I couldn’t make the SH sound. So, after I learned the words, I taught some of the kids at church. And my mom got an earful from some of the other parents whose kids were in the preschool room with me when their kids went home singing, ‘Ring around the rosy, pocket full of posies, ASSES, ASSES, we all fall down.’”

The other four cracked up. “Oh, my God,” Kurt said. “That’s hysterical. I bet all of the other moms just loved you after that.”

Sam just shook his head. He got up and started to clear the table. “Who’s ready to watch TV?”

After a few episodes of *Fawlty Towers*, Elliott needed to leave. Adam decided to head to the subway as well.

“Thanks for dinner,” Adam said. “It was fabulous, as always.”

Kurt hugged him before he got all the way to the door. “You’re welcome. I’m glad you could come. I’ll walk you both out.” Kurt followed them to the elevator and through the lobby to the foyer. He hugged Adam once more. “Good night.”

“Good night, love.” He stepped outside to wait for Elliott.

Kurt pulled Elliott into a hug as well. “I’m so glad I saw you in the park this afternoon. I’ve really missed you. I have a keyboard and Sam has his guitar. We can sing the next time you come over. I’ll add your name to our allowed visitors next time you come. You’ll just need your driver’s license.”

“Sounds great. See you soon.” Elliott stepped outside and walked with Adam to the subway. Once they were halfway down the block, he said, “You’re in love with him still.”

“I am. I have been for a long time. But another great quote from the same author who penned your tattoo quote says that love isn’t just gazing at each other, but gazing in the same direction, or something along those lines. If he had stayed with me back two years ago, I would have absolutely stayed in New York and not auditioned for roles in London at all. If I had gotten any of the roles I auditioned for since I’ve been here, I would have asked him out probably a month ago. Until then, he needed time to heal from what his ex put him through. With me not being able to stay without a job, and him here for another year of school, we aren’t gazing in the same direction. I couldn’t rip his heart that has just healed back open for a month or two of being with him. I lost his friendship back then because of something Rachel did. I have that back now. When I leave in a couple of weeks, he and I will remain friends. If at some point in the future our paths cross again and we are gazing in the same direction and we are both still single, maybe it will be our time then. If he had stayed with me and not gone back to his ex, I would have asked him to marry me by now and I would have done everything in my power to keep those crazy friends of his from walking all over him like they did. I blame them as much as his ex. They were Team Blaine. They considered him to be Kurt’s Prince Charming. I was tolerated, but I think only because Kurt wasn’t ready then and
we were never boyfriends. We dated, but casually like friends. If he had been ready to give us a fair shot at becoming more, I think he would have had to have been willing to walk away from all of them. Let’s stop in here for a few minutes.” Adam stopped in front of a coffee shop and opened the door.

Elliott went in and found an empty table near the window and sat down. Adam sat across from him and pulled his phone out.

“I used to watch this and pray for him and I’m not even a religious person. I know that sounds super weird, but my heart was so broken to see what was being done to the man I loved. I fell fast and hard. He’s a beautiful person on the inside and out. Here, watch this.” Adam handed his phone to Elliott. “I felt like praying and sending good vibes out his direction was the only thing I could do.”

Even though the din in the room made it hard to hear, Elliott caught enough of the music to recognize the song. He watched it all the way through. It was choppy from obviously having been recorded by different people during the different parts.

“Wow. That was a big production. I had heard about it of course. Rachel regaled me with the majesty and theatricality of the whole thing, telling me about how they were soul mates and meant to spend their lives together and so on. She was quite vested in the whole thing, more so than seem normal to me, but I just let it go. He and I met about a month after that I think.”

“There’s just something about the song choice that set me on edge.

There’s nothing you can do that can’t be done
Nothing you can sing that can’t be sung
Nothing you can say, but you can learn how to play the game
It’s easy

Nothing you can make that can’t be made
No one you can save that can’t be saved
Nothing you can do, but you can learn how to be you in time
It’s easy

There’s nothing you can know that isn’t known
Nothing you can see that isn’t shown
There’s nowhere you can be that isn’t where you’re meant to be
It’s easy

And the chorus

All you need is love
Love is all you need.

I really listened and then looked the lyrics up. Of all songs to sing to someone for an engagement, continuing telling the man you supposedly love that there is nothing whatsoever remarkable about him and that all he needs is your love is pretty creepy. I know it’s supposed to be a love song, but it doesn’t feel like one given what I know about their history. All of his friends made him feel like he could never be anything on his own. They made him feel like he was the lucky one that Blaine would deign to lower himself to date Kurt. It took me a month to get Kurt to accept a simple compliment without deflecting it or outright rejecting it. I once complimented him on his ballet technique and his response was that his ex had been the dancer in their relationship. He had been broken up with him for around four months at the time. He slept with someone else two weeks
after Kurt came to the City and four months later, Kurt still couldn’t accept a compliment. I don’t know any of the details of their relationship. I didn’t need to. I could see the damage his ex had done. And I knew that Kurt told me that he wanted to be over him. He didn’t want to go back to him. But whenever he was around, it was like he had this power over Kurt. And then he sang him a song about how Kurt wasn’t anything special without his love. ‘All you need is my love.’ is how it sounded to me. ‘Without my love you’re nothing.’ ‘You can learn to be who I want you to be in time.’ I’m probably just reading into it because I knew it wasn’t what Kurt wanted and I loved him and still do. Anyway, I haven’t told Kurt, but I applied to graduate schools here in New York. I accepted a place at one of the schools I applied to, but if my play takes off in London, I won’t be back to start in the fall. I’m not sure how anything is going to go, but I’ve worked too hard to give up on having my play produced, so I’m going back to London in two weeks. I guess I’m just wondering whether you’re interested in asking him out.”

“He and I were just friends. He was engaged when we met and he was engaged the last time I had seen him before today. And in my false information about him, I’ve been under the impression that he’s been married for the last 7 months or so. In my mind, there’s never been any option besides being friends. I’ve honestly never really even considered it. I’m not the type to cheat with someone and I’m not a home wrecker who breaks a couple up to get one of them to myself to avoid the cheating issue. Now that he’s single, I don’t know. He gorgeous of course, but he and I are working at the same camp this summer. We need time to rebuild our friendship, like the two of you have over the last 6 months or whatever. A year and a half is a long time to be apart. And as you mentioned, the job issue is a big one. I have absolutely no idea what I’m doing once this camp ends. I don’t have an apartment after tomorrow because I sublet my place out for the summer because I’m getting housing through the camp. So, I guess my long-winded answer is I have no plans to change our status as friends to anything else. He was an amazingly talented guy who knew he was talented, but had obviously never met anyone who valued his leadership skills. When we first met, he thought I was going to try to steal the band from him, usurp his leadership, and do things my way. It took him a while to get used to the idea that I joined his band and I would defer to him as the leader. I don’t know him anymore. I don’t know how what he’s been through may have changed him. I still want to be his friend, but as for being more than friends, it’s only been the last four hours out of the last two years that more than friends was even a remote possibility.”

“Fair enough. I didn’t know that you thought he was married all this time.”

“Right. I just found that out this afternoon. And I’m not celibate, but I’m not a player either. I’m not interested in hooking up with him just for the fun of it. Not that I haven’t ever, but I wouldn’t do that with him. So, I mean, if you were back and you started dating, you can rest assured that I would never try to steal him from you. I would still want to be his friend and hope that you don’t go psycho on me yelling at me that Kurt is yours.”

“Did he really?”

“Oh, yeah.”

“I would never push Kurt’s friends away from him, so if we ever get together in some future scenario, I wouldn’t go psycho on you.”

“Good. I really do need to get going. I have to get my stuff out of my apartment tomorrow so the person I’m renting it to can move in tomorrow evening. I’m staying with a friend for the week.”

“Sorry to have kept you.”

“No, no. It was great talking to you. I had heard a little about you, all of it good and I wanted to talk or I would have just told you no when you wanted to come in here.” Elliott stood up and
headed for the door, with Adam trailing right behind him.

Kurt and Sebastian did their weekly shopping while Sam was at work the next morning. When he got back, they headed to the Purchase area to check out a couple of possible apartments to sublet and meet the potential roommates. Afterwards, Kurt drove around the area a little more so that Sam could get a feel for the locations of the apartments and their distance from the campus.

Over dinner, Sam started debating his options. “If I go with the place that’s closer, I could walk to campus, but my truck would be just parked wherever I can find a spot. If I go with the place that’s farther away, I’d have a designated spot for my truck right outside the apartment.”

“You could take my bike. I’ve not been riding it at all.”

“That’s an idea. I could keep it in the back of my truck and just pull it out. I bet I could ride it to class in the same length of time I could walk from the other place. And that place is less expensive. It’s still a lot of money. Sebastian has totally spoiled me letting me stay without paying rent.”

Sebastian smiled. “You’re welcome.”

“I’ll have to tap into the money I’ve saved to pay the rent. I can’t pay everything just working on the weekends here. It still seems like a good idea to get those two classes done with the extra help I’ll get. I haven’t gone to school in a long time. And I always chose the easiest classes possible even though they were super boring because it took me so long to read everything.”

“Well, if you end up not liking your roommates, you’ll only be there in the evening four evenings and five nights a week. Once you’re enrolled, maybe you’ll have access to the art rooms or you could just paint or draw outside until 9:00 or so since it stays light so late.”

“I know I should do it. It’s just a huge step. When I’ve been thinking about going to college since I applied, I kept thinking I’d leave in late August, maybe go to Kentucky for a couple of weeks and visit my family before starting the school year, but if do this, I won’t be able to do that until late August and by then Stevie and Stacey will be back in school.”

“Well, whatever you decide, we’ll support you, Sam. You know that,” Kurt said.

“Yeah, I know. This is just back to those decisions we talked about before – when we were in DC. You know, making decisions that don’t have a right and wrong option, and having no idea which option is actually the best.”

Sebastian said, “Is there a break near the Fourth of July? NYADA has one for a couple of days. Maybe if you get a plane ticket soon, you could get a good deal and go visit them then.”

Sam pulled up the website about the program and found the calendar. “They do have a 3-day break that week, but I’m still supposed to work at the coffee shop on that weekend.” He checked his phone. “Oh, I forgot to tell you both that I got what I requested – the extra shift on Sundays. And that’s a weekend I’m scheduled a double shift on Saturday. I’d miss 24 hours of work by leaving. Sometimes being an adult stinks. Not that I’d prefer to be a child, but I’d like to go visit my family without it causing a financial crisis. The cost of a plane ticket plus losing that much pay is not really a possibility considering I’m already going to have to dip into my savings just to pay for the apartment for the summer unless I can get a job there in the evenings, in which case, it would be even harder to go to Kentucky for five days. Why does this have to be so hard? If I stay here, I
could save up twice what I’m going to spend in rent. Classes or money?”

Kurt answered, “Like you said, there isn’t a right and a wrong answer. If you got a job in the evenings there, you’d at least not have to tap into your savings.”

“I’m just going to do it. If it’s hard, so be it. It will help me be able to take one less class in the fall and spring and make it easier for me to get used to being in school again.” He got up from the table and called to take the sublease on the apartment. “Can I use your laptop to sign up for this program? It will be a lot easier than doing it on my phone.”

“Sure. You know you don’t have to ask.”

“Thanks.” He left and went in their bedroom.

Kurt and Sebastian got up to do the dishes.

“So what do you have planned for tomorrow? A day of relaxation?”

“I’m not really any better at relaxing than you are. I have an optometrist appointment.”

“Tuesday?”

“Dentist appointment.”

“Wednesday?”

“Annual check up.”

“Thursday?”

“I’m getting a hair cut.”

Kurt laughed. “Friday?”

“Picking up my new glasses and contacts. I need a hobby obviously.”

“You want to be a writer. Don’t you ever spend time writing?”

“I do. It’s just that since I left Paris, I’ve not really … I don’t know. I just feel like I don’t have anything to write about. Or at least if I do, it never comes to mind when I just sit down with a whole day of nothing planned.”

“Are those appointments in the mornings or afternoons?”

“Afternoons. I wanted to break the day up and not just go early and come back and sit here.”

“Well, then I’ll be here in the mornings. I’ll entertain you.”

“Oh, really? By doing what?”

“That’s for me to know and you to find out.” Kurt grabbed the dishtowel and started drying the stuff Sebastian was putting into the dish drain.

“You could show me the football videos.”

“Mmm hmm. I could…”
“The sai swords? I’ve waited months for that.”

“Stop guessing. I want to surprise you.”

Sebastian rolled his eyes. “Getting to know you has been one big, 6-month long surprise.” He scooped up some of the suds and blew them at Kurt.

Kurt jumped back laughing. “Hey! I don’t want to mop. Keep those suds in the sink.”

“Yes, Dad.”

Kurt stuck his tongue out.

Sebastian laughed at him. “We need to come up with a new Sunday afternoon routine. Sam’s taken a second shift every Sunday for the rest of the summer. It’s just going to be the two of us here.”

“French Sundays.”

“Explain.”

“Well, on Sundays, the two of us only speak French to each other. You get to give me French cooking lessons and immerse us in French films. You can find what you can at the library, and on the off chance they don’t have it, you can use interlibrary loan to get whatever it is. And if there’s any French culture related activities in the City on a Sunday we go to them together.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“For today though, we can just look through Netflix and see if there area any French movies that looks good. Whenever Sam comes back out when can switch to something else and watch the rest another time.”

“Good plan.”

The movie Sebastian had chosen was almost over when Sam finally came back out into the living room. He waited patiently until it ended.

“That form didn’t take that long, but I had to take a placement test for English and math in order for them to know what to prepare for me.”

“Sounds very thorough,” Kurt said.

“Very.”

“Your choice. Pick anything you want to watch.”

As soon as Sam left Monday morning, Sebastian stood outside Kurt’s door looking in like a puppy who had been left out in the rain. Kurt turned and saw him when he was getting something out of his closet.

“You’re silly. You can come in this room.”

“I wouldn’t violate your privacy to come in here without your permission.”
“I knew that. I just gave you permission.”

“Oh.”

“But for now, go in the living room.”

Kurt followed him out of the room. “So, for today’s entertainment, I’m going to teach you to do yoga.”

“Um. How is that entertaining me? That’s more like being my trainer.”

“It will be entertaining soon enough. We need to stretch.”

Sebastian gave in and played along. They stretched and Sebastian mimicked Kurt’s movements and positions easily. Once they were done, Kurt docked his phone and chose a song to play, but didn’t start it.

“Close your eyes.” Kurt started the song, but it was just to block out the sound of what he was doing. He went in his room, put the harem pants on, tied a scarf with bells on it around his waist, put the jewelry on, and walked back into the living room as quietly as he could. He changed the song and started to move to the beat. “Open your eyes’.

“You can belly dance?”

“I can, and I will teach you. Come on. Get up. Don’t you need to go in and fill out some kind of tax forms or something at NYADA?”

“I do. I’m doing that tomorrow along with my dentist appointment.”

“Okay. Just imitate what I’m doing.”

They spent an hour working on a dance. Eventually they each were wearing half of Kurt’s jewelry.

“I need some of the jewelry for myself. I need to know where to get some.”

“Ah, something else we can do together. We can go tomorrow. I want to take you to NYADA tomorrow morning. You can fill out the tax forms before we leave.”

Alright. This was fun and entertaining. Now, you’ve got me curious about what else you have up your sleeve.”

“Nothing. No sleeves.”

Sebastian rolled his eyes. “Such a comedian.”

“I am supposed to be entertaining you, am I not?” Kurt picked up the yoga mats, took the jewelry back off of Sebastian, and put everything away.

Sebastian followed him back to his room.

“Are you going to follow me around all morning?”

“Yes?”

“How about you pick out your favorite book that you read around age 12 and I’ll do the same. We’ll trade and then we’ll have something else to talk about.”
“Sure.”

“I have some sewing to do. You can sit and watch if you want, but I can’t guarantee that I will be very entertaining.”

“You’d be surprised.”

Tuesday morning, Kurt and Sebastian left earlier than Sam and went to NYADA. Kurt took Sebastian to the stage combat room and began to train him to fight with the bo staffs. After a while, they sat down to rest for a few minutes and get a drink.

“I never thought about you actually training to fight for real.”

“Well, when we were in Boston and that jackass wasn’t going to take ‘no’ for an answer, I told you that I got one of the guys to teach me self defense. I also got him to tell me a good place to train me to actually fight. Not just to know the names of the moves for a choreographed fight. I was very much a pacifist when I was younger. I never fought back. I just let people push me around. It was a strange form of self-protection. If one bully bigger than me could get his kicks by knocking me around a little bit, I was only slightly hurt, mostly bruises. But if I had fought back and had been successful in injuring the bully in anyway, in all likelihood, the next time I would have gotten more of a beat-down to start with. No shoving as foreplay. It would have just escalated the confrontations from the start of the interaction. And the more I fought back, the more intense the bullying would have gotten. And when one of them couldn’t subdue me, there were a lot more to fall in line and help. There was no one to take my side. So losing quickly with the minimal pain and damage was the goal.”

“That’s an awful way to feel.”

“I know, but it was life. I was small for my age. I was a good 8 inches shorter than the bullies my freshman year. By sophomore year, I had closed the gap to maybe 6 inches. I grew a lot and by junior year, I was about 2 inches shorter than most of them, with some of the taller football players still significantly taller than the average bullies. But even with my newfound height, I weighed about 160 to their 210+. I was no match for them physically. Last December, when I ran down that alley without thinking, I could have gotten myself killed. I’m not saying that I would change what I did, but I did decide to change myself and even the playing field a bit. I still wouldn’t be a match for a trained fighter, but for the average bully, I’m much less likely to have the crap kicked out of me now. And I am more than an even match for the average handsy jackass who has been drinking and wants to press me into a wall and take what he wants. I don’t know if there are a lot of guys with my general appearance and build who are into being bossed around and who willingly submit to guys like that in bars, but I am not that guy. And I wanted to make sure that I have the best chance of not ending up in that situation.”

“So outside of class you learned to fight for real.”

“I did. The gymnastics training and my natural flexibility helped. I studied privately and worked up to my blue belt in karate. You’re the only person who knows that. I do not advertise that I know anything other than what I learned in regular stage combat classes. No one knew. I went to someone outside the school for the training, so that I could keep it to myself. I did it for me. Blaine was already super upset that I was getting stronger and more buff than him. I had to comfort him over the fact that he thought the guys in the stage combat class were ogling me.” Kurt rolled his eyes and sighed. “Anyway, I didn’t need him finding out that I was working on even more training, but when he moved out, it made it easier for me to go learn because he wasn’t with me 24/7
anymore and I went and trained in karate. I haven’t had time to go back since I’ve been back in New York, but I might this summer.”

“I was going to say something and I’m just going to shut up.” Sebastian shook his head in disbelief.

“Just tell me. Now, I’m curious.”

“He got upset that you were looking mighty fine with those arms and muscles everywhere? He was displeased that you are so hot the other guys were staring at you? What happened to being like ‘You can look, but don’t touch.’ And feeling smug that he snagged the hottest guy in the room?”

“Umm. Yeah, whatever, Sebastian. Very funny. Let’s go back to fighting.” Kurt picked up both bo staffs and tossed one to Sebastian.

After another half-hour of sparring, they sat down again.

“You’re really good at this,” Kurt said. “You’ve picked up the moves really quickly, which makes sense with your natural dance skill.”

“It is a lot like dancing with more than one person. I’m dancing with you in a type of point-counter point, but we each have our own partners – the staffs.”

“Interesting analogy. But you’re fun to spar with. Are you ready to hit the showers and go to the HR office to sign those papers?”

“Sure. Then, I’m taking you out to lunch.”

“Lunch?”

“Sure. You took me to the cheese shop last week. I’m taking you some place for lunch. Don’t worry. I’m sure that whatever you’ve packed to wear to work will be more than nice enough.”

Wednesday morning, Kurt had Sebastian sit on the sofa near the bookcase. He brought his sai swords out and demonstrated his skills.

“Oh, God that’s hot. You have to teach me. We didn’t get to wherever we needed to go get the belly dancing stuff. Tomorrow we’re getting that stuff and some swords for me.”

Kurt laughed. “Sure. Come on. I’ll show you what I know. I didn’t have anyone teach me. I bought them online and watched YouTube videos to learn how to do it. Go slow. You don’t want to end up letting lose and injure yourself or the walls or the floor or the furniture.”

“I get it. I got it. Swords are dangerous. I’ll be careful.” After working at it for a while, he said, “It’s even harder than it looks and it looks hard.”

“I’d suggest you get some leather gauntlets since you can afford them. I had to make do with using ace wraps to protect my arms when I was learning.”

“Tomorrow, we’ll get whatever. This is fun.”

The next morning, they headed out shopping.
“Sam’s been really quiet and hardly home.”

“I know. I’ve missed him. He’s spending a lot of time at the co-op. He’s still going to see us when he comes back on the weekends, but he’s not going to have much time to do anything with the people he’s made friends with there since he usually hangs out there on weekday evenings and he won’t be here during the week anymore.”

“How are you doing?”

“I’m going to miss him. It will be weird sleeping alone. I haven’t slept by myself in 7 months. But I was so busy and he’s been spending his evenings at the co-op, so I think at first it will be missing him at dinner the most. I’ll have to come home from work alone. I just thought of that.” He sighed. “I’ll just have to get used to it. I knew he wasn’t going to stay, but facing him leaving is hard.”

“I was fine being alone here, and then you two came and now I’m used to both of you being here.”

“It will be different.”

They made their way through throngs of people on the subway platform and got in. When they got back off, Kurt took Sebastian’s hand and led him through the crowd and up the stairs and around the corner before he let go.

“So, jewelry and belly dancing clothing first.”

Kurt walked down a couple of blocks and turned and walked another couple of blocks to a shop. They went inside and Sebastian was surprised to see the wide selection of options. He picked what he liked and the clerk packed everything up for him neatly. He thanked her and they left. From there, they took the subway again and went to a shop that sold swords and leatherwear.

“So, I’m armed and charmed. Now, what?”

“Well, you said you were getting a haircut today. Did you make an appointment?”

“No.”

“No?”

“Fine. One of the guys at Vogue is doing it this afternoon. I was going to surprise you with a slightly edgier cut.”

“Ooh. Sounds fun. Okay, well, we could go to a bookshop, a music store, a vintage junk store…”

“Sure. Any of that. All of it. Whatever. You seem to know fun places to go, so take me to some interesting places.”

“So, boys… you know I have to see what’s in those shopping bags,” Isabelle said as she stepped into Kurt’s office. “I saw you come in with them and I’m just too nosy to mind my own business. Bring them this way. There’s more room in my office.”

Kurt and Sebastian followed her across the hall.

“Spill. Where have you been and what did you find?”

Sebastian laughed and rolled his eyes. “I’m not showing you everything.”
“Oh, but darling, you will. I know you will.”

“Batting your eyelashes might get you a lot of things, but I’m not sure why you think it works on me.”

“Because you love me and you know you want to show me what’s in the bags. You’re just torturing me for the fun of it.”

Kurt laughed. He opened one of the bags and pulled out a 2010 Vivienne Westwood shirt.

Isabelle gasped. “Is that?”

“It is.”

“That will look fantastic on you. Where did you find that?”

“And give away my secrets?”

“I HAVE to go there.”

“Fine, you can see the address stamped on the bag.”

She took her phone out and photographed the address. “I’m going there.”

“What else did you find there?”

He pulled out a brooch.

“I need to borrow that.”

He laughed. “Sure. I’m certain it’s not real, but it’s a very nicely done knock-off.”

It’s really cute and vintage and I like it, real Cartier or not.

“Me too.” He took out a plaid wood cape coat next.

“I will pay you twice what you paid for that. I need that.”

“I’ll think about it. I can’t just hand over everything awesome that I find.”

“But I really need that Vivienne Westwood cape.”

“But think how awesome it will look with my plaid boots.”

“You’re right. But I still need that cape. What else did you find? There are other bags from other stores. Why didn’t I get invited on this shopping spree?”

“You work in the mornings.”

“Technicalities,” she waved her hand.

“I did bring you something, if you like them.”

She stuck her hands out and closed her eyes. Kurt placed a pair of sunglasses wrapped in tissue paper in her hands. She opened her eyes and unwrapped them.

“You found these there?”
“5.”

“No way. And yes, I want them. Of course, I want them.” She slipped the vintage 70’s two-tone tortoise, square framed sunglasses on and looked at herself in the mirror she had in her desk drawer. “Perfect. They even go with my outfit today. You are taking me shopping the next time. I’ll suddenly come down with food poisoning or something. Call me.”

“Of course.”

Sebastian hadn’t opened his bags still.

“Is there something embarrassing in your bags, Sebastian? Did you go to a sex toy shop?”

“ISABELLE!”

“What? You’re single. You’re a young man who has needs.”

“Shh. No, I didn’t go to a sex toy shop.”

“Oh, don’t worry about anyone overhearing. If you found a new amazing place, they’d want the address. Come on. Let me see.”

He took the belly dancing stuff out of the bag.

She looked confused. She picked a few of the pieces up. “You’re making a costume of some sort?”

He laughed. “Not even close. No teasing me. Swear?”

“No teasing.”

“Kurt’s going to teach me to belly dance.”

“Ooh. Sexy. I should add that to our next office party – male belly dancers.” She looked at Kurt. “You inspire the best ideas.” She looked at Sebastian’s other shopping bag. “What’s in the other bag? Did you go to a fetish shop?”

“What?”

She pointed to the writing on the bag. “The bag says ‘For all your leather needs’.”

He pulled out the gauntlets and the sai swords. “He’s going to teach me to use them and the gauntlets are to keep me from hurting myself while learning.”

“This I have to see. Kurt…”

“In here?”

“We can go out in the conference room and you can show everyone.”

“Here’s perfect. May I?”

“Sure.”

Kurt picked up Sebastian’s new sai swords and demonstrated some of his skills.

“And I’m adding sword-wielding men to my party list.”
Kurt laughed and put the swords back in the shopping bag.

“Well, this has been an enlightening conversation and I love my sunglasses, but I believe you have an appointment in the salon. And you my dear, I need to come up with a way to wheedle that cape from you. Put your amazing finds away. We have a meeting to go to.” She laid the sunglasses on her desk, picked up the brooch, and fastened it to her shirt collar.
Chapter 21

Friday morning was tough for Kurt and Sam especially. Sam got up early and did all of his laundry and packed up his summer clothes, a few pairs of jeans, and a jacket, along with all of his art supplies so they’d be ready to take to his new apartment Sunday evening when he got off since he was working a double shift both Saturday and Sunday and they were all headed to Jersey City Saturday evening for Mercedes’ concert.

After Sam left for work, Kurt went to his room and pulled out the book Sebastian had given him to read, turned on some quiet music, and lay in the bed and read. Sebastian saw him as he walked into his own room and grabbed the book Kurt had given him to read and stood in the doorway of Kurt’s room. Kurt nodded and Sebastian sat on Sam’s side of the bed and read.

After about an hour, Kurt got up, got his laptop, and sat back down next to Sebastian. He pulled up a folder and turned the computer so that Sebastian could see and played the recording he had of him, Brittany, and Tina doing the “Single Ladies” dance.

“Oh, wow. Nice unitard. I’ve seen those hip movements already though with the belly dancing, so that isn’t shocking.”

“This is the back story to how I ended up on the football team. The first take of this video was interrupted by my dad coming down to my room and finding us recording. Brittany told my dad I was on the football team. In order to save face, I talked to Finn the following day to get the coach to let me try out. Finn met with me that day after school and found out that I’m a naturally talented kicker. I tried out the next day after school, but I insisted on having ‘Single Ladies’ play and I danced part of it before I kicked the ball straight through the center of the goal post.”

“Nice.”

“So, I played in the next game. We were tied at 6-6. I kicked a last minute field goal and we won. It was the first game the team had won all season.”

“Did you keep playing?”

“For a while, but being on the team was no better than not being on the team as far as the bullying went and being on the team meant spending more time with people who despised me, so I quit.” He opened another video file of the Cheerios at Nationals and let it play.

“That was impressive. Seriously.”

“Thanks. I didn’t continue on the squad. I thought it would give me a place to shine, but it just made me a pawn in Coach Sue’s demented game with constantly changing rules. She was supportive, and then she’d tear me down. I just didn’t need that.”

“I’ve never met her, but she comes across as abrasive.”

“That’s an understatement, but yes.”

“Now you’ve seen the sai swords, the football and cheerleading videos, and you’ve seen me belly dancing and fighting. I don’t think I have any secrets left.”

“I’ve heard a couple of things, but I don’t know if they’re true.”
“Go ahead.”

“You wore a kilt to prom. You won Prom Queen. It wasn’t the first time you had worn a kilt or skirt to school. You wore a corset to school.”

Kurt closed the file with the videos in it and put the laptop down on the bed. He got up and looked through a CD holder and pulled one out. He picked the laptop up, sat back down, and inserted the DVD. “There. On that DVD are all of the photos of outfits that I especially liked and took photos of myself in. Feel free to look at all of them or whichever ones you want to. The clothes you’re referring to would be in the folder labeled School 2009/2010, but there are some in the School 2010/2011 folder, near the beginning. I went to Dalton from late November to late April, so there won’t be as much in that folder as the one from the year before. The prom outfit is in a file labeled Prom 2010/2011. I’m going to go prep some stuff for lunch.” He took his phone with him and docked it in the living room and turned some music on while he chopped.

A few minutes later, Sebastian came out of the bedroom carrying the laptop. “Why did you leave?”

“Because inevitably there will be laughing and I’m not in a place emotionally where I can take that today. You teased me relentlessly about my clothes being girly, and the things I wore when I knew you were nowhere near the level of girly you’re going to see in those photos. You said you were sorry for what you had said. I accepted your apology and forgave you, but if you look at those in the other room, it will save me the heartache of hearing you laugh.”

Sebastian took the laptop into his own room and closed the door behind him. Kurt continued to wash and chop vegetables. They were having stir-fry for dinner later anyway, so he took his frustration out on the raw vegetables. An hour later, Sebastian came back out of his room. He put Kurt’s laptop back on his desk before going back out to the kitchen.

“Do you need any help?”

“No, I’ve finished. I put all of the vegetables for the stir-fry back in the fridge. I have soup ready, if you want some.”

“Sure. Whatever you’ve made is fine. Thank you for cooking for me.”

“You’re welcome.” Kurt ladled soup into two bowls. He handed Sebastian one of the bowls, picked his own up, grabbed a spoon, and sat down at the table.

Sebastian asked, “Would you like some water?”

“I’m fine, but thanks for offering.”

Sebastian put his bowl and spoon down on the table and filled a glass with water. He sat down and said, “I know I apologized and you’ve asked me to stop, but I need to say something. I know I’ve told you that I was being mean on purpose.”

Kurt nodded.

“But I think I still didn’t make myself clear about the fact that I knew your clothes were either vintage designer stuff that you had somehow managed to get or that you had created your outfits using what was available to you to create runway looks or styles from fashion magazines. I think what you’ve misunderstood is that at no point in time did I actually think you looked like a girl or did I find the way you dressed to be unattractive. It was quite the opposite. You rocked the clothes you wore. You always looked good. I attacked the way you dressed because I knew that there was no way that the way you dressed was accepted by the backwoods, uncultured troglodytes that you
went to school with. I knew that your clothing, looks, and voice would be the obvious things that they would have tormented you for.”

Kurt nodded.

“What I’ve failed to make you understand is that I was lying to upset you. The homophobic losers you went to school with may have actually disliked those things about you, but I didn’t. You have always been good looking. You had excellent skills at recreating or making what was all the rage in the fashion scene at the time. Your voice is beautiful. It’s amazing. You can sing things that few people can. I just want to make sure that you know that I don’t and didn’t actually believe the things I was saying to you or about you. I was mean, but I was lying. I won’t apologize again because you asked me to stop, but I just needed to tell you that.”

Kurt nodded. “Thanks.”

“And one last thing.”

“Okay?”

“We discussed being honest.”

“Yes.”

“You seem to think my compliments are jokes. That doesn’t inspire trust from my perspective. If I say something nice, I mean it. I know it’s not what you necessarily expect from me, but can you try to remember that I’ve quit lying to you? I’m not flattering you or mocking you through compliments. If I say I like something, I mean it.”

“Okay. I’m sorry about that. I do know that you said you’d quit lying and you have. And I do trust you. I just don’t trust compliments. I’ll work on it. Adam was the only guy who ever complimented me and meant it. You can ask him about it. I think he spent a month complimenting me daily, even multiple times a day before he broke me of the habit of rejecting what he said or deflecting. He was the first person to pursue me as a potential friend and more. I’m still a work in progress. I’ll work on taking what you say at face value and not assuming that you’re teasing me.”

“You do for the most part. It’s just if I say anything personal like in the stage combat room when I commented that anyone with a gorgeous boyfriend ought to be glad about that and you acted like I was being weird. I can think you’re good-looking without hitting on you. Sam’s sweet and gorgeous and I don’t hit on him. Adam’s really kind and handsome. Elliott is both adorable and hot. But I’m not going to hit on your friends – our friends. I know that you’ve accepted that I wasn’t a player, but your knee-jerk reaction is to fall back to that, which is completely my fault. If the first time I met someone I heard him telling my boyfriend that he’d willingly cheat with said boyfriend, that person would not rank high on my list of people of upstanding character. I get that. I set myself up for the issues that we still have. And I accept responsibility for that. I just want you to know that I’m perfectly capable of recognizing how gorgeous you and our friends are without it being a come-on or hitting on anyone.”

“Okay.”

“I’m celibate, not blind.”

Kurt laughed.

“I’m not ready to invest myself in a romantic relationship yet. I know it’s been years for me, but I was pretty messed up. I’m not saying that the next person I date will be the person that I marry, but
the next person I date will be the type of person I would consider marrying at some point in the future. I think we were in a similar position for very different reasons.”

“Maybe.”

“I’m not going to seek out someone when I’m not sure what I’m doing in a year. I can’t in good conscience just start dating someone that wouldn’t be interested in moving to France with me. I haven’t decided if that’s what I’m going to do or not, but it is a serious contender for what happens after I finish my degree next spring. I did the ‘leave the man I love behind in another country’ thing before. I have no interest in doing that ever again.”

“I get that. I do. I’ll do my best. And I’ll add it to my list of things to think about in my notebook. I’ve been making a lot of progress and I’ve been dealing with a lot of the issues. You’re right, though. Even with Adam, I changed my behavior and my response, but how I felt never really changed.”

Sebastian looked confused.

“About the compliments. I changed my behavior. I smiled or nodded and outwardly accepted the compliment, by thanking him or saying something else positive. Like if he complimented something I wore, I would mention where or how I got it or the process of making it. Or if it was something I did, I might say who taught it to me or how I learned it. And that got him to go on with the conversation. When I rejected or deflected, it made the interaction remain focused on the compliment. I’ve talked to my therapist about his already, obviously, since I can sit here and dissect my responses. What I never managed to achieve was actually accepting the compliments and filing them in a ‘things that are true about me’ file folder in my brain. Instead, they got filed in a ‘things that Adam says to me to make me feel better about myself’ folder.”

“I see. I guess it’s good that you realize this at least. I don’t have any words of wisdom on how to change the labels on your file folders.”

Kurt laughed.

Sebastian smiled and nodded.

“Thanks for playing along yesterday about the cape. I’m definitely giving it to Isabelle for her birthday. She seems like she would be easy to buy for, but she’s not at all, at least not in a price range that I can afford. I know it’s weird to get my boss a present, but she’s more than that to me. At least now I know that she will like it.”

“No problem.”

Kurt stood up and put his tableware in the dishwasher. “Do you want anymore?”

“I’m good. Thanks.”

Kurt put the rest of the soup into a storage bowl and put it in the refrigerator and washed the pot and put it in the dish drain. “I need to go get ready for work. I’ll meet you outside the Copper Cup as soon as I can after I get off.”

“Sounds good.”

That evening after they got off, Sam went back to the apartment to change before he headed to the
co-op for what turned out to be a surprise going away/congratulations for making it into art school party. Kurt told Sam he needed to stop to do something before going home. He met up with Sebastian, as they had planned. They made it there in time to get the card signed by everyone before Sam got there.

One of Sam’s friends made a cake that said ‘Congratulations’ on it and few people brought some drinks. Once the cake had been eaten, one of his friends gave him a wrapped present. Sam opened the card first.

“It’s from all of us,” someone said.

Sam smiled. “Thanks. You didn’t need to get me anything. Really.”

“We know. Just open it,” someone else said.

Sam took the paper off to find a Netbook. “No way. This is too much. I can’t accept this.”

“Sam, they aren’t that expensive and we all chipped in. Take it. You’ll need it for school. Trust me.”

Sam nodded. “Thanks. I don’t know what else to say. I’m going to miss everyone. I’ll try to stop in on Fridays sometimes if I get into town before closing. And anyone who wants to say ‘hi’ can stop by the Copper Cup. I’ll be there every other Saturday and every Sunday from 6 to 6.”

He handed the computer to Kurt to hold and he went around the room giving out hugs and handshakes before they went back to the apartment.

“I know that one of you had something to do with me getting a laptop.”

“Who us?” Kurt asked.

“Yes. None of them would have known that I didn’t already have one.”

“Well, perhaps when asked what you needed, a little bird might have mentioned it.”

“And does that little bird have a name?”

“Will it make you feel better to know that none of them contributed more than $10 each? Those netbooks really aren’t very expensive. They just wanted to get you something you really needed. They were thinking art supplies initially and were going to get you a gift card to an art store, but when I mentioned that you didn’t have a laptop, they chose that instead.”

“Well, it was really unexpected.”

“You should be able to plug in a microphone and use it to record your professor’s lectures in the fall if you feel like you can’t keep up with what’s being said. That way you can take notes. You can also use the camera on your phone to take photos of the board so that you can add whatever is written to your notes on your computer. Even if you get notes from other people, the laptop will allow you to do research from your room rather than having to go someplace to use a computer.”

“Well, I appreciate the little bird’s gift-giving advice.”

“You’re welcome. I chopped everything for dinner already, so it won’t take long to make.”
Sebastian washed the dishes while Kurt and Sam set up his new laptop.

“When you finish the dishes, pick out something for all of us to watch. Maybe a TV show episode. I still have to get up at the crack of dawn. I’m getting off at 5:00 so we’ll have enough time to get to the concert. I’ll change super quick and we can leave. I’m excited to see her. It’s been ages. She’s going to be fabulous. I just know it.”

“I don’t think Sebastian knows about how she got her break.”

“I don’t.”

“It was Sam’s doing. We did a disco week in Glee and Sam recorded Mercedes singing and he posted it to YouTube. One of the people who saw it got in contact with Mercedes and offered her a spot as a back-up singer on an indie label in LA. That got her noticed and she was offered her own CD, but when she wouldn’t dress more risqué for the album cover, they wouldn’t promote her. But she was picked up by another label when she did a mall tour for her own CD, and that CD is what she’s on tour for now.”

“So, it all started with a YouTube video. That’s really cool.” Sebastian walked around the counter and the end of the sofa and opened the cabinet. He put in the last *Fawlty Towers* DVD they had been watching and started the next episode.

Saturday afternoon, the five of them met at the 59th Street stop on the green line and started their journey to Jersey City for the concert. When Kurt had told Mercedes about running into Elliott, she added another ticket to pick up at the will-call window. They got there about a half-hour before the concert was due to start. Kurt and Sam went backstage before the show, while the other three secured seating for them.

“Sam! Kurt!” She threw herself into Sam’s arms and then stepped to the side and pulled Kurt into a hug. “I’m so glad you are here. It’s so nice to see friendly faces. I’ve missed you two.” She hugged them both again.

“We’re excited too,” Kurt said. “And you know where we are. Feel free to visit us whenever you’re slumming it on the East Coast.”

She hugged Sam at third time. “I’m so proud of you getting into art school. I always knew you were talented. Back when you were so wrapped up in how your looks were the only thing going for you, I wanted to smack you, but I knew you wouldn’t listen then. But you’ve got your head on straight now. I’m so excited for you.”

“Thanks.” He held her tight and spoke quietly where only she could hear him. “I miss you. I’m sorry. I know you told me to move on. But I still love you and I miss you.”

“I know, I know. You know I still love you too,” she replied so only he could hear her. She stepped back. “Didn’t the others come?”

“Yeah, they’re waiting until after you sing to come back. They didn’t want to intrude.”

“Well, I need to go get my mic on and get ready. I’ll see you again in a little while. I’m so glad you’re here.” She walked toward some of the tech people who were waiting to get her ready.
When they went backstage after she had finished her set, they found her seated at what was going to be the Meet and Greet area for after the show. They lined up in front of the table to talk to her. She got up and walked around the table.

“I’d like to introduce you to my friend Adam, who had gone back to England before you moved to New York.”

Adam reached out to shake Mercedes hand.

She pulled him closer and wrapped her arms around him and hugged him. “Any friend of Kurt’s deserves a hug. And that means you too Sebastian. Get over here. You’ve been a good friend to my boo ever since he went back to the City. You’re one of the good guys now.” She released him and grabbed Elliott. “And you I haven’t seen in ages. I moved to town and finally got to meet the amazing Elliott that Kurt never shut up about and then you vanished, but I’m so glad the two of you ran into each other.”

He laughed and hugged her back. “Me too.”

“And you’re going to be working at the same theatre camp. That’s awesome and sounds like a lot of fun.”

“I hope so,” Kurt said. “We need a selfie with our only famous friend.”

They all gathered around in front of the backdrop and one of the PR people took a photo with each of their phones.

“Well, line up like proper fans for the autograph signing,” she teased. She walked back around the table and sat down. She pulled out three CDs and put Adam’s, Sebastian’s, and Elliott’s names at the top and then signed them. She pulled out two that she had already autographed and handed them to Kurt and Sam. “Read them later.”

They nodded.

“And concert t-shirts for all of you.” She pulled out black t-shirts with her album cover on the front and the concert dates and locations written on the back. She looked through them and handed one to Kurt and then distributed the other four.

“Wow, swag and CDs. We hit the jackpot,” Kurt teased.

“You know it, boo. I know how to treat my friends right. I better get a ticket to each of your first shows or whatever you do.”

They all laughed and nodded.

Sebastian leaned over to Kurt. “I’ll get Adam and Elliott to go back out with me so you two can spend some more time alone with her.”

Kurt nodded. He went around the table and grabbed 2 chairs and moved them to the opposite side of the table so they could sit across from Mercedes.

“So, how is touring? Do you enjoy it?” Sam asked.

“Yes and no. I love performing, but the constant travel is exhausting. The tour bus is nice, but it’s
still confining and restricting because it’s moving all the time. I can’t just decide to go for a walk when we’re out on the highway. But the performing part is magical. I love singing for the crowd.”

“Well, you were awesome, like always,” Sam said.

Kurt agreed, “You really were.”

“Are you as okay as you make yourself sound in the emails you send me?”

“I am. Seeing a therapist has helped a lot. If I had seen a good one when we broke up the first time, I would have never gone back to him. I’ve learned a lot about toxic people and toxic relationships and the type of people who get involved with people like that. And I’m working on not being one of those types of people anymore. I’m still working on myself.”

“Good for you. Whenever you’re ready, you deserve someone amazing.”

“Thanks.”

“And what about you?” she asked Sam. “Are you excited for the next phase?”

“I’m nervous, but a little excited. I think I’ll be a lot more excited if I make it through the summer. The academic classes were what kept me back in high school. I didn’t get any help from the school. Supposedly, this will be different. We’ll see. I know I’m not stupid, but sometimes what is asked of me is beyond my ability, like writing essays with no spell-check like they made us do on those standardized tests. I just can’t do that. In school, I got lectured about my bad spelling and sloppy handwriting. No one would ever move past that and help me learn to write better, except Kurt. He was the first to overlook how I spelled things to see what I had to say. If these teachers are like that, then I may have a chance. We’ll just have to see.”

“Well, I’m proud of you for putting yourself out there and giving it your best shot. If it’s not for you, then you can move on. At least you’ll have given it a go.”

“Yep. Are you coming back to this area any time soon?”

“Not that I know of, but we do have a tour break in August. I’ll just have to see if they schedule studio time out in LA or if I’ll actually get some time off.”

They sat and talked until the people who had VIP Meet and Greet passes started to show up to line up. They moved the chairs back around the table. They each hugged her before they left to meet back up with the other three guys.

Later that night, Kurt and Sam were lying in bed.

“I miss her.”

“I know. You still love her.”

“I do.”

“She seems to have more free time than I had realized. Maybe you could write to her more often than you have been. She didn’t seem to be 100% committed to the touring life. Maybe once she’s had her fill, she’ll be more in the mindset of doing something like performing on Broadway or another place with a strong theatre community. But you also have to realize that you two may
never be more than friends if she decides to continue with the concerts and touring, unless you change your mind and decide that you can be happy in that kind of living situation. I know there are singers that have pets and families, but there’s a lot more work to that than a more traditional arrangement.”

“This is where you and Adam are, isn’t it?”

“Similar, but not quite. He and I were never in a romantic relationship like you and Mercedes. You two dated. You moved away. Things didn’t go the way you had hoped after you came back. After she came to New York, you rekindled things. You two have lived together and you know that it worked, even with Blaine being there. Adam and I are still just a shadow of what could be. If he were staying, I would probably be willing to try with him. He’d be so easy to love. But the timing hasn’t been right. I wasn’t ready. I need to be a whole person before I date again. I’m close. Sebastian and I were talking about some stuff earlier – some stuff that I need to deal with still. But I am so much better.”

“What about Sebastian and Elliot?”

“What about them?”

“They’re both good looking and nice.”

“Yeah, I know. I like both of them a lot. I’m actually surprised at myself about how much I really like Sebastian. He was an ass, but he grew up. My dad talks about how he wasn’t a model of good behavior as a teen and look at him. Some people grow up and others don’t. Sebastian really has. And Elliott is awesome. He always was. He never tried to push himself to the forefront. He shared the limelight. We always worked well as a team. He was a good friend. He listened to my ideas. I listened to his. And there’s you.”

“Me?”

“You know what I told Sebastian ages ago? Not long after we moved in.”

“What?”

“That if you had even the tiniest of interest in men that you and I would have been married ages ago.”

Sam laughed. “Is that so?”

“It is. Am I wrong?”

“Probably not. I think the only secret of mine that you don’t know is that there was a while when I really wished I could feel that way about a guy, specifically you. We get along and it’s so easy between the two of us. It was never like that with any of the girls I’ve liked, maybe more so with Mercedes than the others, but this was before she and I got back together here later. I told Sebastian some stuff as well and he told me to look up the words for love in Greek. I realized that I feel four of out of five different types of love for others for you, just not eros, which is sexual interest. So, your assessment of us being married by now if I could feel that type of love for you as well is probably accurate.”

“I don’t think I have any secrets that you don’t know. It’s too bad people can’t adopt brothers. I read about some old ceremonies from back I don’t even know how long ago now where men could enter a ceremony and become brothers, kind of like how people have a ceremony and get married. I would totally do that with you.”
“Sounds cool. I bet it involved cool costumes and what not. We should do it. I totally would.”

“I’ll have to see if I can find the info on it. I don’t even remember where I read about it or what historical time period it took place in. I guess the closest thing I have to a secret right now is that I was hoping that you would be close enough that I’d still get to see you fairly often. I do like Sebastian and he and I have buried our old hurts and we’ve moved on and we’re friends. I’d even say close friends. But he’s not you. And I’m going to miss you. You just make my life better.”

“Now, you’re going to make me cry and I’d been doing such a good job of avoiding that.”

“You know that crying is good for you and not at all a sissy thing to do.”

“I know. I’m going to miss you too, you know. But I’ll be back every weekend this summer and we can still do our every other weekend sightseeing like we have been.”

“I know. I’m glad. I need to let you sleep.” Kurt turned over on his side and tried to fall asleep.

Before Kurt and Sebastian went shopping Sunday morning, they discussed the changes they needed to make to their shopping list and realized that they actually needed to add in some items for breakfast and lunch in order to accommodate for Adam staying with them for the week. When they came back, they did their normal cooking and prepping for the week as soon as they came back from Costco.

Kurt was standing at the stove browning ground turkey and boiling chicken and he had put a pork roast in the oven, along with a half of a turkey breast. Once he had everything going, he started talking.

“Thanks for letting Adam come and stay with us this week.”

“It’s not a problem. He’s my friend too you know.”

“I know. I kind of feel bad.”

“Why?”

“I moved in and brought Sam and then Adam into your life and you let them in and became friends with both of them in your own right, and now they’re leaving. It’s like I brought something nice and then it’s getting taken away.”

“Oh. Try not to feel that way. You came in and swept away the loneliness that I had imposed upon myself. I could have resisted your efforts to be my friend. We could have just co-existed in the apartment. I didn’t have to drop my carefully built walls and let you and your friends near me. I kept them up at Dalton. I could have continued after you moved in. But there was just something about you and your sincerity and I was tired of being alone. I had just never felt like the risk was worth it. But it was with you and with your friends, who are my friends too now. I’ll miss them both, but I don’t regret making friends with them or with you.”

Kurt nodded.

“Are you regretting inviting Adam back into your life?”

Kurt shook his head. “No, not at all, but it’s so hard that he’s leaving. I don’t want him to go. I wanted him to get one of the roles he auditioned for. I’m excited that his play is going to be
produced, but I selfishly wanted that to happen here, not in London.”

“I can understand that. He means a lot to you.”

“Having him here this week will be bittersweet. Spending so much time with him and then him leaving.” Kurt wiped the tears streaming down his cheeks away with the back of his wrists. “The men I love are leaving and it’s hard.”

Sebastian put down the knife he was using and washed his hands. He walked over to the stove and turned the front two burners off and pulled Kurt into a hug.

“And Elliott doesn’t know if he’ll be here after the camps end and you’re probably going to go back to Paris. And I’m having a pre-emptive pity party for when I’ll be all alone here in the City again.”

“I’m not leaving any time soon.”

“I know, but it just gives me that much more time to love you and then have it hurt even more when you leave.”

“You love me?”

“Of course, you dork. We’re friends. Sam said you were the one to tell him about the different words for love in Greek.”

“I did.”

“Well, I looked them up. It’s dumb that we don’t have equally descriptive words for the different kinds of love. We have a ton of words for ‘white’, just look in the paint department some time.

Sebastian laughed.

“But we only have one for love. I looked up a list of words that were at the bottom of the page as well to see what some of the current descriptions of those Greek terms might be. Sam and I have either a bromance or a romantic friendship. Maybe both. I had a hard time distinguishing the two. If he and I were both asexual we’d probably just get married. He absolutely wouldn’t care that everyone would think it was gay or bi. But neither of us is asexual and I love him more than I can explain and not in a sexual way. If I ever end up dating someone again, whoever it is will have to not be jealous of Sam. I’m not losing him again. If my boyfriend or husband walked in and found me in bed snuggling Sam, I would want his response to be to just lie down too or to go on about whatever he was going to do. There is nothing that a boyfriend of mine has to be concerned about with Sam, but it will probably be hard to find someone who understands that. I know that Blaine didn’t and I hid my bromance with Sam whenever anyone else was around. I didn’t want him to be harassed for being gay or to be harassed for trying to convert him or badgered because I was too close to him. But I’m not doing that again. I love him and he loves me and I’m not giving him up.”

“I’ve never had that type of relationship with anyone and I had never seen it until I met the two of you. But I could totally see how someone new in your life would be intimidated and think there was something sexual going on between the two of you. Society has made such a big deal about gay and straight guys being friends and add that to how weird people are about guys expressing their feelings at all. I’m sure it was a lot harder in Lima. I get it now, but I’ve lived with the two of you for over 6 months. It actually reminds me of Nick and Jeff. They never indicated that they were anything more than friends, but they were so close that people assumed they were sexually involved in secret. I wasn’t close enough to them to know, but I heard the gossip.”
“I let my life-altering case of hero worship get in the way of actually making friends with any of the other Warblers. They were all friendly to me, and accepting – as far as prep school guys who had 25-year plans for their lives already written out for them could be. I didn’t fit into their future in any way. At that point in time, my dad wasn’t a congressman. He was just a small town mechanic. And I spent all my time trying to be the kind of guy Blaine would like. He told me that everyone wore a blazer for a reason and that I needed to stop trying so hard to stand out. I needed to fit in. I couldn’t, but I did. It’s stupid to talk about. We were talking about Nick and Jeff. They had been roommates since they started at Dalton. It could very well be that they are just like me and Sam, but it could also be that they were dating in secret. The two of them, Trent, and Thad were the nicest to me when I was there. Thad at least laughed at my attempts at humor.”

“After I reformed, they accepted me back in the group, but after Hunter came, things were just different. I think he killed what was left of the brotherhood aspect of the group and the respect the whole school had for the group plummeted after the steroid use came out.”

“When I went to spy, Blaine told me the Warblers were like rock stars. And he was right. Everyone loved them and there was this respect that you could feel that was generational. The guys whose fathers had attended Dalton respected the Warblers. And you didn’t understand that and you contributed to them becoming petty because you wanted to win and a bunch of them were already angry that Blaine had left them. It wasn’t a good mix. But none of that got out to the school itself, so it would have been Hunter who actually tarnished the Warblers’ reputation.”

“I was petty. You’re right. I was angry and sick of hearing about Blaine this and Blaine that. You had him and everything I wanted. I lashed out at you. I tried to woo him back to Dalton – a lame attempt at rebuilding what the group felt like they had lost.”

“He should have stayed at Dalton. He has issues. I won’t deny that. Following me to McKinley was bad for him and for me. I wanted what everyone else had and in the end I guess I got it – a screwed-up high school romance.”

“You sound more accepting of what happened and less angry than you used to.”

Sebastian turned the heat back on and continued to cook the meat himself while Kurt slid up on the counter and talked.

“I am. I’m still mad at myself. I still don’t trust myself, but I have actually let a lot of the anger go. I was a willing participant, which is not to say that I believe in victim blaming because I don’t. And I can see both sides to my situation. I absolutely was gas-lighted and manipulated, but I also walked back into the situation twice. I’m not to blame for how I was treated, but I knew that I wasn’t happy like I should have been. I knew that our relationship was unbalanced and I wanted someone of my own too much to deal with the red flags that I saw. I know that there are people who end up in toxic relationships who are in them with masters of manipulation who have no idea of how they ended up bamboozled. And in some areas, I was that person, but in other areas, there were enough red flags for me to have looked closer. But I couldn’t bear to be alone again. The rest of the people he conned into believing he was this amazing guy were all on his side and I readily admit that I contributed to that in a way.”

“What do you mean?”

“I never spoke to anyone about any problems that he and I had. I didn’t like how gossipy everyone was about their relationships. I felt like a relationship was something private and personal. You’re actually the one that let the cat out of the bag about you and Blaine being in contact with each other when you came into the Lima Bean that day. You came in all full of yourself and how you were the captain of the Warblers and you had gotten the info from Blaine about what we were
doing for Regionals. I didn’t know he was still texting with you. I had never complained about it. No one knew about Scandals. And you walked in and announced that you had called him. Called him. Calling people on the phone is much more intimate than texting.”

“I manipulated the manipulator. That’s what I was doing the whole time. It was straight out of my step-mother’s playbook.”

“You sealed his position in the New Directions when you injured him. They were so angry with him that Puck didn’t even want him in the room with us. And then you injured him and suddenly, he was in. He was one of the underdogs. He was a martyr. He stepped in front of the slushie that you meant for me. I had never mentioned the fact that I disliked you. I just never talked about you. I told Blaine you were bad news and that he should stay away from you. I found out that day that not only had he not done what I had asked, but also you had gotten close enough to him to feel comfortable calling him. Anyway, I kept all of our issues to myself. I was supportive when he got the role I needed in West Side Story. All of that concealing our problems came back to bite me in the butt forever. I mean it’s still going on now. Everyone thinks Blaine is amazing. Later, even after he had cheated on me, when I tried to point out anything problematic, I was just told to ignore it or get over myself about it because Blaine was too amazing to let go of over something petty.”

“I added to that.”

“Not in the way you think. Back in high school, you contributed to the feeling that I wasn’t good enough for him and that made me feel like I would have to try harder to be who he needed me to be or he would find someone else who thought he was the amazing guy he was and who would be good enough for him. But what I’m talking about was long after that. I jumped forward. Rachel would have lassoed Blaine for herself if he had been even remotely bi. Back in high school, she tried to take him even when he said he was 100% gay. She was absolutely Team Blaine. And of course, she and I were roommates. It was always ‘when’ we got back together, not ‘if’ or her just dropping the subject completely like I wanted her to. I’m 95% sure that if I had not been living with her that I would not have ever gotten back with Blaine. I would have been able to move on, but Santana showed up and the ties to Lima were too strong to break free from.”

“She’s a force to be reckoned with. She snuck into an all-boys school and confronted me.”

“She thrives on confrontation I think. Back last fall, she totally laid into me about every insecurity I’ve ever had in the middle of the hall at McKinley – pointing them all out in a loud voice for everyone to hear all of the reasons why I wasn’t good enough for Blaine. I thought we had become friends, but she was just racking up ammo to use against me. Rachel just stood there and didn’t say one word in my defense. And then, Santana went and invited us to get married with them. It was like as soon as I took Blaine back, all of the disgust she had felt for me was gone and we were friends again. It’s all so crazy.”

“That’s insane.”

“That’s my life with the New Directions and the only people I had ever known as friends. If I had just stayed here like I should have last fall, none of that would have happened. I went back to him twice. I have to take responsibility for that. I sat back and let other people dictate my life because I couldn’t face the consequences of the reality that I was nothing to them and I was nothing without them. I really was the mom. They wanted unconditional love from me and they wanted my attention, but they wanted to be able to be as totally bratty as they could be and not lose that love. They were like preschoolers. They knew they could draw on the walls with markers and at the end of the day they’d still get a hug and tucked into bed. And that hug and tucking into bed was all I had to keep me going. I was really screwed up. They were absolutely in the wrong, but I had
enough awareness that I could have tried to get help. I reached out to Maggie and I think it was sort of a catalyst. I had gotten to the point where I felt like I had nothing to offer other than the ‘supportive mom’ role I had been shoehorned into. Performing with some of the great Broadway stars of yesteryear might have given me just enough of a boost to see that I could be something on my own. I am less angry because I’ve taken ownership of my choices and I’m doing what I think is best for me right now. I’m to the point where my therapist is trying to help me see what I can take away from the experience. It’s a past experience that is over. By refusing to go back to him, the ‘Klaine Show’ can’t have a revival in the future. My therapist asked to make a list of things that I could take away from the experience.”

Sebastian turned the heat off and let everything cool enough that he could pack it up and continued to listen to Kurt.

“I learned that I need to be cautious of giving more of myself than I have to spare. I’ve learned that I’m not happy without someone to nurture in some way. I’ve learned that people can like me for who I am right now and they can still like me if I make changes to improve myself. I don’t have to be less than other people in order to be liked. I’ve learned that I can’t compare my outtakes to someone’s final cut.”

“What does that last thing mean?”

“It means that for the most part people we meet are doing their best to portray their better side. We don’t often see people when they smash their finger with a hammer when trying to put a nail in. We don’t see when a famous chef burns his grilled cheese because he got distracted. We don’t see what people look like at 3:00 in the morning with their ratty pajamas and bed heads. We see the put together version – the version they’re trying to sell us, in a way. Too often I see all of my mistakes and failures and compare them to other people’s successes. And it’s like comparing the gag reel or the outtakes to the final cut of a movie. I can’t compare myself to other people that way.”

“It’s an interesting analogy.”

“It also helped me think about the fact that I kept all of my outtakes to myself. I came across as very cold and too far above the nonsense to be bothered. I got left out of being a part of things because no one even considered that I might enjoy the activity. So, that’s one of the other things I’ve taken away from my past – if I want included, I have to be more open.”

“And I’ve seen that. You don’t have fortress-strength walls up around you anymore. You’re more vulnerable.”

“I am. And in doing just that, I let Adam close to me and today I’m throwing myself a pity party about the one person who’s never hurt me going back to Europe. And Sam is going to be gone two-thirds of the time and when he is here, he’s going to be working all the time except two days a month. And then I’m projecting about Elliott leaving at the end of the summer and how much it will hurt when you go back to France. And sometimes being vulnerable and open and loving people really hurts.”

“But is also amazing and beautiful and wonderful.”

“Are you sure?”

He turned and face Kurt and stepped as close as he could. He tipped Kurt’s chin up to meet his eyes. “I am. I worked through my past. I let down my defenses for the first time in years and I got you.”
Kurt rolled his eyes.

“Hey, don’t. That hurts. We just spent a lot time talking and you said you weren’t going to rebuff my sincere statements.”

“You’re right. I’m sorry. I still don’t feel like something that would be – what did you say? Amazing and beautiful and wonderful.”

“Well, I’m pretty sure that if I ask Sam, Adam, and Elliott that they will agree with me. And you seem to think pretty highly of them, so I think I’m in good company with my opinion.”

Kurt smiled slightly. “Maybe.”

“Well, I know I’m right.” He stepped back a little and offered Kurt a hug.

He hopped down off the counter and accepted it. “Thanks for listening. I feel better. Even though I still feel like crying. It’s going to be a hard week.”

“It will be for all four of us. Change is hard.”

Kurt nodded and grabbed bowls out of the cabinet to start putting things in them to store in the refrigerator.

Kurt had all of Sam’s food packed in a small cooler they had bought at Costco that morning. He and Sebastian had taken the cooler with storage containers that he had packed down to the parking garage and put it in the back of Sam’s truck with Kurt’s bike. Everything was ready for him to leave and dinner was ready to eat when he got back from his shift.

They sat down together to eat.

“We put all of your stuff in your truck already.”

“Oh, wow. Thanks. You didn’t have to do that.”

“We wanted to help,” Sebastian said.

“We cooked and your dinners are packed in bowls. You’ll just have to bring them back next weekend, so we can repack them,” Kurt said.

“You’re still going to spoil me even in Purchase.”

“If I can, I will. You know that.”

“I do. This is really good.”

“We tried a new recipe. I think it came out pretty good,” Sebastian said.

“Me too.”

“We bought the backpack you found online. It’s in on the bed with your laptop in it. We didn’t take it down yet. If you leave your uniform, I’ll wash it with my clothes and then it will be here clean when you come back this weekend.”

“Thanks. That’s one thing I didn’t think to ask when we were in the apartment is whether there’s a
washer and dryer."

“You can just bring your laundry basket with you. It can wash while we eat dinner or watch a movie or whatever Friday evening,” Sebastian said.

“Alright. Thanks.”

Kurt said, “I looked up what we talked about last night after we went to bed. And I did more research. What I found says that you and are romantic friends.”

“I’ve never heard of such a thing.”

“Me neither.” Kurt took his phone out and read off the screen. “It’s a very close, but typically non-sexual relationship between friends, often involving a degree of physical closeness beyond that which is common in the contemporary Western societies. It may include, for example, holding hands, cuddling, hugging, kissing, giving massages, and sharing a bed or co-sleeping without sexual intercourse or other physical sexual expression. But it also says that this term was used a long time ago, which is why none of us had ever heard it before.”

“I’m more inclined to say bromance.”

“Yes. I agree mostly, except that’s what Blaine considered the two of you to have had.”

“Well, honestly, he’s wrong. So, I can reclaim the word and use it myself. I never felt close to him like I do to you. I was always just enough down the social scale and vocal talent scale and the grades scale that I was sort of a project to him. It’s all very weird and convoluted and I don’t want our dinner conversation to be about him. But just trust me when I say that I was never open with him like I have been with you or even with Sebastian. I didn’t talk about the real issues that I dealt with. It was all surface with him. There was one type of love mentioned in that list of Greek words.” Sam pulled his phone out and looked for something. “Ludus. That’s it. It mentioned a playful love between children and how in adults that would be seen sort of like guys sitting in a bar, bantering and laughing. He was a diversion. I was depressed and being ‘best bros’ was a diversion. I know he thought that you and I had never been close, but you had wanted it that way. You insisted on protecting me at school from people harassing me about being your ‘piece on the side’ with what had been written in the Muckraker that time. So, I kept up the farce that we hadn’t been close.”

“I know. We’ve talked about this before. I’m not angry anymore. We all did a lot of stupid things and I can’t blame anyone when I have plenty of blame of my own. You stepped up when I really needed you and now we’re where we are.”

“I don’t think I ever told you this, but it’s the perfect example of what I said. He saw me in the kitchen at school putting bags of pasta in my backpack, but I didn’t see him see me. The next day, he offered me $50. He said something like, ‘Just take it. It’s only $50.’ That’s what I meant by feeling like I was a project. He told me that he had seen me take the pasta, which was expired and Marley’s mom had left for me to use for an art class project, and that he legitimately believed that I was stealing pasta to eat because I had no food. I lived with YOUR family. Did he seriously think that Carole wasn’t feeding me?”

Kurt laughed. “Carole not feeding you? That’s funny. No more talk of him. I’m done. He’s no longer relevant. So, unless he shows up and makes a nuisance of himself in my present life, he will have no more place in my thoughts in as much as I can do that and if he pops up subconsciously, I will consciously send the memory to the compost to leave more space for new good memories.”
“Good plan. I’m nervous about tomorrow. I hope this doesn’t all just blow up in my face.”

“You’re not going to be that far away. If you need help with something, text me, and then we can Skype and I can help you or Sebastian can if I’m at work.”

Sam let out a sigh. “I know. I do. I just have to go in willing to give it my best shot. That’s all I’ve got.”

“Very true. If this doesn’t work out and you decide not to go in the fall, I’m not going to think any less of you,” Kurt said.

“I know.”

“Good. We’ll clean up and you can go change and look around to make sure that we didn’t miss anything.”

About ten minutes later, Sam came out carrying the backpack over his shoulder and holding a portfolio in his hand.

“I didn’t see that anywhere.”

“I brought it home with me from work last night, but in my excitement from the party and being given a laptop, I forgot to show you. It was under our bed. The art department gave it to me as a going away/congratulations gift.”

“That’s a really nice leather portfolio. I like the flap over the zipper. That will help keep things dry.”

“They said it was waterproof.”

“Even better. I’m going to walk you down. I’ll wait for you by the elevator.” Kurt walked out of the apartment leaving Sam and Sebastian alone.

“Thanks for being so supportive. Kurt’s taking this pretty hard. I know this is a combination of Adam leaving too. It’s just a lot at once.” Sam propped the portfolio against the wall and hugged Sebastian. “See. No dying,” he teased.

Sebastian laughed. “You’re a good man, Sam. Thanks for being patient with me. I’ll see you Friday.” Sebastian opened the door for Sam to walk through.

He headed toward the elevator where Kurt was waiting for him. “Hey.”

“Hey, you. I’m going to miss you so much, but I know you’ll be back Friday. And Saturday we’re going to Coney Island. It will be a ton of fun.” He hugged Sam before the elevator door opened.

They stepped out. Kurt waved as Sam crossed the lot to get to his truck. He stood at the door and waited for Sam to exit the lot. Sam saw him standing there and waved as he drove past.

Adam arrived later that evening in a taxi. He didn’t want to try to fight the subway with two suitcases and a carry-on in tow. He knocked on the door and Kurt opened it and let him in. Adam barely had time to shut the door and move his suitcases out of the way before he had an armful of Kurt. Adam smiled and happily wrapped his other arm around Kurt and squeezed gently.

“Now, that was some welcome. I don’t think I’ve ever felt so welcomed. Good evening, love.”
“I’m glad you’re staying with us. I only have to work from 2-6, so you won’t be here alone too much of the time and of course, your free to come and go as you’d like. Sam left his door key for the week so you can use it.” Kurt pointed to it on top of the shoe cabinet.

“Thank you.” Adam picked it up and attached it to his keyring and put it back in his pocket. “Is Sebastian not at home?”

“He’s changing. He’ll be out in a little bit. Come on in. I didn’t mean to trap you by the door.” Kurt stepped back and walked over to the couch. “We have leftovers from dinner, if you’re hungry.”

“That would actually be lovely. I thought I’d have time to grab something earlier, but I didn’t. I ended up staying later at Juilliard than I thought I would. I really enjoyed my time there, but that’s come to an end. I learned a lot though.”

“That makes it worth all the effort.”

“Mmm hmm.”

Kurt opened the fridge. “Just pick what you want and we can warm it up.”

Adam pulled out a couple of bowls. “These look great.”

“Sure.” Kurt grabbed a pot and heated up the soup.

Adam grabbed a fork and opened the bowl of fruit salad and started eating it. “Thanks for letting me stay here this week. It really cuts down on my expenses. I thought I was going to have to get a hotel room.”

“Elliott is bunking at a friend’s place for the week. He sublet his place out starting this evening as well, which makes sense since the dorms closed for the summer.”

“Are you excited to work at the camp?”

“It should be interesting at least. I still have absolutely no idea what I’ll be doing.”

“You’ll have to write to me and tell me all about it.”

“Write?”

“Have you forgotten how to write letters, love?”

“I haven’t written a real letter… maybe ever, now that I think about it. We had to write some mock letters in English class. And I remember having to role play and write a letter as if I were a soldier in the Civil War or on the Oregon Trail for history class one time.”

“Well, then, it will be a new and exciting venture. We’ll Skype too. We can be modern and old-fashioned both.”

Kurt laughed. “Okay. Sounds like fun.” Kurt grabbed a bowl and put Adam’s soup in it and put it on the counter next to where he was standing.

“What sounds like fun?” Sebastian asked, as he entered the room, now wearing his pajamas.

“Adam wants me to write him real letters, like on paper, and mail them to England.”

“Should we introduce him to the amazingness that is Skype?”
“He knows about Skype.”

“Well, that’s good. I would hate for him to have spent all those years in school here and go back to England completely uninformed. It would make the American education system look even more lame than it is.”

Kurt laughed. “This is a topic you do not want to discuss with him unless you want to hear a long rant on the ineffectiveness of forcing teenage students to take courses outside their intended field of study, thereby extending their high school career by a year for absolutely no good reason.”

“I see. I sense a long, personal story for this very specific complaint.”

Sebastian said, “Definitely. I’m going to head to bed. I have an early morning meeting with Cassie before the first class, so I have to be out of here by 7:00.”

“Thanks for letting me stay.”

“You’re welcome. Any time. I’ll see you in the morning if you’re up early. Otherwise, it will be sometime tomorrow afternoon.” He went down to his room.

“Movie? Reading? Music?”

“What do you normally do this time of night?”

“Sleep,” Kurt said and laughed. “But that’s because I’m used to having to get up early to get to class or getting up early to study. Sam got up at 5:15 every morning for 6 weeks after we moved here and he still gets up that early on the weekends, so I became a very early riser and went to bed early. But I’m willing to stay up. If you want, you’re welcome to sleep in my room with me or you can still sleep out on the couch if you’d prefer.”

Adam stuck a bite of food in his mouth toward the end of the question.

“I don’t hog the covers or kick. At least I don’t think I do. I never wake up with all of them anyway, but I guess Sam could be sleeping with a death grip to keep hold of his half.”

Adam laughed.

“And he doesn’t seem to have any bruises on his shins from being kicked during the night.”

“Fine, you’ve convinced me that sleeping in the same bed as you is not dangerous. Would it be okay if I showered first?”

“Of course.”

Adam put his bowl and spoon in the dishwasher. Kurt had already put the other items in and washed the skillet.

“I’ll just be out here reading. Take your time. “Oh, there’s a bathroom in my room. Feel free to use it since Sebastian already went to bed.”

“Thank you, love. I’ll be back soon, feeling much less grimy, I’m sure.”

“Les sorciers?”
“Yes. Sebastian and I decided that we both needed a hobby or at least something else to do over the summer because we are both used to being a lot busier than we will be this summer, so I asked him to let me read his favorite book from when he was 12 and this is what he gave me to read. I gave him *Eragon* because it was actually *Eldest* that was my favorite at 12 because it had just been released, but it was the second book in the series. So, he’s reading *Eragon* right now.”

“That’s an interesting idea. I guess I didn’t realize you were that fluent in French.”

“Oh. I guess I never really talk about it much. I’m completely fluent. It was my mother’s first language and she taught me. Well, not exactly taught. She spoke to me in French as a baby and my dad spoke English to me, so I grew up bilingual until she died. Then I continued to study so that I wouldn’t forget.”

“I see.”

“But I didn’t really have access to popular French young adult novels, so this is a first for me. I’ve read more academic literature. You know, the books that schools think are important for students to read.”

“Right. I do know. Sometimes, while very educational, they can be less than riveting.”

“Exactly. And this is for fun.” Kurt moved his bookmark to his current location and put the book on the shelf next to him. “So, you learned something you didn’t know about me. Tell me something that I don’t know about you.”

“Hmm. Let’s see. I love rollercoasters and I’m excited about riding the Cyclone on Saturday.”

“Ooh. Me too.”

“I hate to be a spoilsport, but would you mind ever so much if we just called it a night and we go to sleep? I’d love to keep talking, but when I’m more awake.”

“Not a problem. I washed the sheets earlier today, so everything’s fresh and ready. I’ll be in shortly. I’m going to shut off the lights and check the door.”

Adam was sitting on the end of the bed when Kurt walked into the room. “I didn’t know which side you prefer.”

“Oh, um, I’ve been sleeping on the left because Sam sleeps on the right, but I’m fine either way. I’ll be right out after I brush my teeth. You can turn the light off if you want, I’ll be fine.” Kurt came out a few minutes later and Adam was already asleep with the light still on. Kurt turned it off and lay down as well. He didn’t fall asleep nearly as quickly as Adam had.

“Kurt?”

“Hmm?” Kurt realized that he was snuggled up behind Adam. He scooted back immediately. “I’m so sorry. I should have forewarned you, I’m a sleep-snuggler, like people who sleepwalk. I sleep-snuggle. Sam’s used to it. He’s actually very snuggly. I’m sorry.”

“No worries, love. Really. It’s been a long time since I’ve had a good snuggle.”

“I can sleep on the couch tonight or you can. I’m sorry.”
“I’m not bothered. I promise.”

“Alright.” Kurt still looked positively remorseful.

Adam laughed. “Am I that bad of a snuggler that you look that distraught about it? My niece didn’t seem to think I was that bad at it. My skills may have plummeted in this past year though with no one to snuggle.”

Kurt laughed. “Your snuggling skills are quite fine. I just completely didn’t think when I asked you if you wanted to sleep in here with me. Sam already knew of my deviant sleep habits, so he was prepared. You were snuggled without warning or giving consent.”

“Well, I hereby retroactively grant my consent to be snuggled by you. I was quite overdue for a snuggle anyway.”

Kurt laughed. He picked up his phone to check the time. “It’s 8:04. I haven’t slept this late in … I don’t even know how long.”

“Well, I slept quite well, love. Snuggle and all. I was wiped out. I helped the guy who bought some of my furniture move it out of the building, and then I helped the girl who is subleasing my half of the apartment move her stuff into the building.”

“Come on out to the kitchen. I’ll make you breakfast.”

“You don’t have to cook for me.”

“I know, but I want to.”

Four hours later, they were still lying around on the sofa in their pajamas talking.

“I’m going to have to get ready for work soon. You could come with me. I’m sure that Isabelle wouldn’t mind. Sebastian goes with me frequently enough. I’m not sure what’s in the vault that might fit, but it could be fun.”

“Are you offering to take me into the secret inner sanctum of the fashion world?”

“I am.”

“I’m in. Just for the fun of it. If I get on anyone’s nerves, I’ll leave.”

“I don’t think you could get on anyone’s nerves.”

“You’re sweet, but I’m sure I can, love. But I’d love to go. How should I dress?”

“Just wear something nice and you’ll be fine. The first day Sam went to work he wore really bright blue Chucks just to get a rise out of Isabelle.”

“He didn’t.”

“He did. It took less than five minutes for him to be in the vault choosing more appropriate foot attire.”

Adam laughed. “I’ll go grab my stuff and get ready in Sebastian’s room if you don’t think he’ll mind.”
“I’m sure it’s fine.”

“Well, good afternoon, Adam. What a pleasant surprise. If you hang around, I’m sure someone will attempt to put you to work, so stick close to Kurt if you don’t want to get sent on some errand somewhere to pick up who knows what.”

“I’ll do that.”

“I was actually going to take him into the vault for a tour. That’s why I came a little early. He’s leaving the end of the week to go back to England and I thought this would be a fun thing to do before he goes.”

“Not a problem. You know the way. I’m not sure what we have that will fit, but if you see something, just text me a photo so I can okay it.”

“Thanks.” Kurt turned to Adam. “Follow me.”

“Oh, wow. No wonder you have so much fun here.”

“Have a look around. Is there anything you actually need?”

“Well, I could use a nice suit for the opening night of my play.”

Kurt started scurrying around and picking out suits and showing them to Adam.

“You know, love. I can’t tell one from the other to be perfectly honest, other than the color. I think a nice black suit would be good. I could change up the shirt and tie and pocket square and create new looks. It would look good with black shoes and socks. You know make things easy for the fashion-challenged person that I am.”

“Well, you look good in everything I’ve seen you in. So, I wouldn’t worry about being fashion-challenged. How about one of these then?” Kurt held up three suits in sequence.

“Sure, love. If one of them fits, it will be perfect whichever one it is. It will be a thousand times nicer than any suit I own.”

“There’s a changing room. You can try them and see.”

A few minutes later, Adam came out in the first suit. Kurt snapped a photo and had him turn and he took a second one.

“Go ahead and change. I’ll give my opinion after I see all three.” Kurt took photos of the other two as well. “Stay in there for a minute.” He looked through the photos. “Put the second one back on.”

Adam stepped out in the second one. Kurt approached and checked the fit of the pants and the shoulders on the jacket.

“This one is a little more full cut through the shoulders. It definitely fits better than the other two. I don’t think the waist needs let out, but if it feels too tight, there is some room to let it out.”

“They’re fine, love. They feel fine.”
“Leave the slacks on and I’m going to bring you a couple of shirts.” Kurt went and found a lovely deep cornflower blue shirt as well as dark mulberry colored one. “Try these two. Slip the suit jacket on over the top.”

“These are very bold.”

“They are, but you can buy basic colors anywhere to wear for less bold occasions.”

“That’s true.” He came out wearing the blue shirt.

“That’s very striking. What do you think?”

Adam looked in the mirror. “I do fancy it, actually. I’ll try the other one as well.” He came out a few minutes later and looked in the mirror. “Surprisingly, I like this as well.”

“Keep it on.” Kurt texted Isabelle, who arrived just a few moments later.

“Oh, that looks fabulous,” she said as she came in the room. “Definitely. What else did you pair with it?”

“Nothing yet. Just the two shirts.”

Adam grabbed the other one to show her.

“That’s lovely as well. Alright.” She walked over to the ties. She brought a few and held them up, rejecting a couple and handing them to Kurt, who put them back. “There. These two.” She went back for the matching pocket squares. “Now, you’re ready for whatever dress event you need to go to.”

“The opening night of my play in London.”

“Congratulations. That’s fantastic.”

“Thank you. I am excited, but nervous. At least now, I’ll look the part. Are you sure about me taking these?”

“I’m sure. You look quite dashing. I’m ready for you in my office, Kurt. As soon as you’re done in here.”

“I’ll be right there.”

Adam stepped back into the fitting room.

“I’ll leave a garment bag out here for you to put everything in to take home and I’ll bring the bag back tomorrow. If you find some shoes you like, just text me a photo and I’ll get them approved or not. Text me when you’re done and I’ll come back and walk you to my office.”

“You’re sure about all of this, love.”

“Quite sure. I’ll come back for you when you’re done. If you see something else you love, just have it out until I come back. Just so you know, there are video surveillance cameras in here, so don’t change into anything unless you’re in the dressing room.”

Kurt and Adam entered the apartment to find Sebastian in the kitchen cooking.
“Well, it looks like you took Adam to Vogue with you and you raided the vault. What did you get?”

“A black Brioni suit, two Van Huesen dress shirts, two ties and pocket squares, a pair of black Fendi dress shoes, two Bugatchi button-up, and a really fantastic John Varvatos brown leather jacket and a scarf.”

“And some brown leather moto-inspired boots, it seems. Quite a successful visit then.”

He looked down at his feet “Most definitely. I do love the boots and the leather jacket.” He took it out of the garment bag and put it on.

“Oh, nice. I like that. Was there a black one? I might have to see Isabelle tomorrow if there is.”

Kurt answered, “There is.”

Sebastian smiled a scheming smiled and winked at Kurt. “I know where I’m going tomorrow after class.”

“It smells great in here. What are you making?”

“It’s a chicken and broccoli casserole with wild rice.”

“Mmm,” Kurt said. “Thanks for getting it started.”

“No problem.”

Kurt’s phone started to ring and it made him jump. They all three laughed.

“Practically no one calls.” He answered. “Sam? How did your first day go? Can I put you on speaker?”

“Sure.”

Kurt pressed the speaker. “So, how was your first day?”

“It was fine. It was so much better than I had anticipated. It’s more like what was called a resource room when I was younger. There are computers and some people working, but the courses are on the computer. The books we have to read have audio with them, so I can listen and follow along rather than having to read it on my own. I asked if it was cheating to use it and I was told that it was there to be used by anyone who wanted to use it. I was told the point of the class to learn to analyze the literature and write papers. There’s also a program called Ginger installed that is amazing. It tells when words are spelled wrong, but it also reads the options instead of just showing them to me. Showing me 10 words that are similar never helped, but when the program reads each one, I can quickly pick the word I was actually trying to spell. It’s really helpful. And the math class is online too. We watch a concept being explained in a video where I can see the problems being solved. Then I get a quiz and I answer the questions online and get my score. If it’s not 80% or higher, I can’t move on until I retake the quiz and get 80%. This is how school should be. When people get F’s it’s obvious they don’t understand, but they move on to the next lesson anyway, but not in this class. There’s an exam each unit and I can take it twice. Each test has different problems, but the same types of problems. So, if I don’t do well the first time, I can get help from one of the teachers in the room and practice again until I learn how to do the problems I missed and then take the test a second time.”

“It sounds like just what you need.”
“It really is. If regular school had been like this I could have done so much better. I always felt like I was being tested on my reading skills instead of what I had learned. I never could finish tests, so I always did poorly and I spent so much time slogging through the assignments just to end up with bad grades because I read too slowly to finish a test, not because I don’t know the answers. I know you’re probably getting ready to eat dinner, but I wanted to tell you that it’s not at all what I expected. It’s so much better.”

“I’m glad you called.” He took the phone off of speaker and walked into the bedroom and shut the door. “I took you off of speaker. I miss you already. I’m glad it is going to be okay. I know how worried you were.”

“I was. And I miss you too. My roommate is nice enough, but he’s not you. I’ll see you Friday though and Coney Island is Saturday. I’m stoked.”

“Me too. I’ll see you then.” Kurt hung up and changed his clothes before he went back out into the living room.
The three of them sat down to eat and ate once Kurt came back out of the bedroom from talking to Sam.

“It seems like it’s a lot better than he had anticipated it being,” Adam said.

“It really is,” Kurt said. “He was legitimately afraid. The teachers at McKinley did nothing to help him. This seems like a really good set up for him.” Kurt turned to Sebastian. “How was your first day as an official TA?”

“It was fun. No different than during the school year.”

“And the class you’re taking?”

“Oh, I liked that quite a bit. It’s a comparative literature course with a focus on translation. It’s a special senior seminar class. The people in the class all speak French and English, so we’re reading the literature in its original language and not using translated texts. We’ll be assigned portions to translate and we’ll compare our translations and discuss the differences and how our word choice, syntax, and style affect the meaning and feeling of the text.”

“That’s cool,” Kurt said.

“I think it will be. I did realize something today though.”

“What’s that?”

“I need to figure out when my belly dancing lessons and sai sword lessons are going to be.”

Adam nearly choked.

“You did that on purpose, Sebastian.” Kurt laughed.

“I didn’t mean to actually make him choke. I was trying to tease him into joining in.”

Adam coughed a bit more, and recovered after he took a few swallows of water. He cleared his throat. “Of course. I know absolutely nothing about either pursuit, but I’m all for learning new things. You never know when a skill might come in handy.” He winked at Kurt.

“Fine,” Kurt rolled his eyes and smiled. “I’ll give you both lessons.”

They finished eating, cleaned everything up, and sat down to read for a while, allowing their dinners to settle a bit before starting the dancing.

After 20 minutes of sincere effort on his part, Adam tried to bow out of the belly dancing lessons. He sat down on the floor laughing. “I’m afraid I’m no good at this, love, but I will gladly sit and watch you and Sebastian practice. I am never going to be able to move like that. I see why Cassie chose you to be her TA, Sebastian. You are very good.”

“Thank you.”

Kurt paused the music. He held his hands out to Adam and pulled him back up to standing. “No,
no. None of that. It’s not about being good at it. It’s about having fun. I used to do this in my room by myself just to relax and enjoy the movement and the music. I gave it up for a long time to be more acceptable. I didn’t have any privacy where I could just let myself go and move to the music. You both know what the outcome of Santana, or even Rachel, seeing me dance like this would have been. Just close your eyes. Don’t watch us. Just move and feel. If it will help, Sebastian and I will turn around so we can’t see you. Just dance.”

“All right.”

“We aren’t going to laugh at you. I promise. Sebastian was the first person I showed this to. It was last week when I had free time for the first time ages and he was bored. We just danced. He had fun and wanted to get the bells and pants to wear while doing it. He gets paid to dance exactly they way Cassie wants. I pay to take classes to do exactly what Cassie and the other dance instructors want. But dancing is freeing if you just let yourself move. I didn’t know how at first either – how to let go. Everyone criticized my non-choreographed dance moves because I was stiff and controlled in my movements, not wanting to be publicly sensual unless it was part of a planned performance where everyone else was doing it as well.”

“You’re right. I’ll give it another go.”

Kurt turned the music back on and they resumed dancing around. The second time around it went a lot better. Adam relaxed and got into it more. About a half-hour later, they were all on the floor stretching out and cooling down.

“That was fun once I got over myself. I still get too worked up about doing things ‘right’ sometimes. I actually might add some freestyle, belly dance inspired movement to the end of my yoga workouts.”

“We’ve been in school so long that we spend so much time focusing on doing things right that we forget that we actually just liked doing the things at one point in time. Swapping favorite pre-teen books with Sebastian helped me remember how much I used to love to read books. I’d be at the bookstore the day a sequel was being released if I had the money to buy it. Or I’d put my name on the hold list at the library the day the release date was published, so I would be first in line to get it when the library got their copy. And then high school came along and forced me to read books I wasn’t interested in and some I was. But then I had to analyze them and I was forced to spread out the chapters and only read them as assigned so that I wouldn’t mess up some potential foreshadowing or predict-the-ending assignment I’d get.”

“Hey, I like doing all of that text analyzing,” Sebastian said.

“I know. And I don’t dislike the idea of it. But I don’t think the teachers I had did a good job of making it interesting. We had to find what they thought we should find in the text. If we felt something else or saw something else, it didn’t matter because it wasn’t the widely accepted analysis of the text. It was all about writing five-paragraph essays where I shared my version of the accepted view of the meaning of the book. It wasn’t me writing an essay on what the book meant to me or how I did or didn’t identify with the main character or some other character in the book. It wasn’t about how the book changed my point of view or how it didn’t. The whole process was just about my ability to come up with some way to write the same paper that every other student in that class had written ever since the teacher started teaching that particular class.”

Adam said, “That sounds like a waste of time.”

“It was. And it never encouraged anyone who wasn’t already interested in reading books to take it up as a pastime. It’s like what PE did. If they had offered aerobics, yoga, pilates, or even dance as
alternative to traditional PE classes, students might have learned to like exercising and staying fit and they might have continued to do it as adults. But forcing people to play soccer, basketball, baseball, run track, etc. for six weeks each only makes people who don’t exercise hate the idea of it even more. Only athletes continue to play sports past high school. But everyone could learn to power walk or do step aerobics or yoga and continue to do it for a long, long time. Even our cheer coach managed to take the fun out of cheering our teams on. I think I just went to the worst school ever or schools are completely failing in their purposes.”

“I see that at NYADA too, though,” Adam said. “And in the industry itself. People come in with their hearts set on performing and they get nit-picked to the point where they don’t even want to open their mouths around other people for fear that they’ll do or say something wrong and it will spread around the school like wildfire.”

Sebastian said, “I see that in the classes. It’s hard to keep that level of single-minded focus that all of the teachers expect for their classes, I would imagine. With musical theatre, you’re expected to excel at a lot of different things. A regular major in college is more like a single Olympic event. Yeah, you might run to stay in shape to play basketball or you might lift weights, but those aren’t your focus. With Musical Theatre, it’s more like being a decathlete or something.”

Kurt thought for a minute. “That’s an interesting analogy. I’ve never really thought about it that way, but you’re right. And even when we’re at the top of all of those areas, we still have to keep more skills in our back pockets if we don’t want to starve between actual roles, like costume design or being able to build sets and backdrops. Or we have to look outside theatre and keep working in coffee shops or like I do at Vogue. But even with the huge raise I got working there, I could never actually live on my own in this city on that income. I’m obviously still struggling with my life choices. I do love theatre, but is Broadway itself what I want? I thought it was. Maybe it is. Too much thinking. We’re supposed to be having fun.” He got up off the floor.

“Watching you two dance around like Shakira was pretty fun,” Adam said still lying on his back on the floor.

“Hush, you. How about Scattergories or a card game?” Kurt sassed back.

“Hmm,” Adam bemoaned. “Your idea of fun sounds nothing like what I had imagined ‘fun’ would be like in New York City.”

“Oh, well, if you were looking for a week of orgies, you have seriously come to the least likely place for that to happen,” Kurt teased. “We can find the nearest gay club and you can have your pick of guys, I’m sure. We’ll even go as your wingmen, if you want. We can pretend like Sebastian came with you and then ditched you for me. Someone will take pity on you.”

Sebastian wiggled his eyebrows. “I’ll even let Kurt do my make up and I’ll wear some of his tight jeans.”

Adam laughed. “Now, that I might pay money to see. Letting Kurt glam you up. Let’s see – just a little eyeliner, some hair products of some sort, maybe paint your fingernails black, and Kurt’s pants. It could be a good look on you.”

“Well, we can play dress up if you want,” Sebastian said. It’s only a little after 8.

“I haven’t had a spa day in ages,” Kurt said. “I used to do them for the girls. Facials, manicures, pedicures, and I’d do deep conditioning treatments on their hair. Neither one of you kills your hair by dying it or using blow dryers on it every day though, so you probably don’t need the hair treatment. But we can do the other stuff.”
“Why not?” Sebastian said.

“I’m in.”

“Alright. I need to go change and put this stuff away,” Kurt said.

“Me too.”

Kurt showed them how to wash their faces properly. Then left them to do it in the bathrooms while he made the masks. They came out and hopped up on the counter in the kitchen and Kurt applied the masks to their faces and then to his own. He hopped up next to Adam to wait.

“At least it smells good,” Sebastian teased.

Adam said, “I’m not even hungry and it makes me peckish.”

Kurt laughed at the two of them. They sat for a few more minutes until the timer went off. Kurt showed them what to do next and then had them wash their faces again. When they came back, they hopped back up on the counter and Kurt put moisturizer on both of them.

“Now, see if I had someone to do this for me every day, I could get totally into this,” Adam said. “Being pampered is very relaxing.”

“If you cleanse your face carefully and put the moisturizer on yourself every night, your skin will maintain its youthful qualities for longer.”

“I’ll think about it,” Adam said. “It seems to be working for you.” He relaxed and let Kurt rub the moisturizer in.

Kurt washed his hands and then did Sebastian’s next.

“I’m with Adam on this. If someone else did this for me, I’d be a lot more into it than doing it myself.”

Kurt washed his hands again and did his own.

“Now, what?” Sebastian asked.

“Well, we can do the manicures if you want. I’m not sure we can do the pedicures very easily. I don’t have the dish tubs I use for them. We could get some tomorrow. They’re only $1 or so.”

Adam said, “Then manicures it is. I’ve never had one.”

“Me neither.”

Kurt put some water and his secret mix into three bowls and he started with Adam. He sat down and Kurt trimmed, filed, and buffed his nails. Once he was done with that, he had Adam soak his hands and he started the process on Sebastian.

After Adam’s soaking time was up, he rinsed his hands. Kurt had Sebastian start soaking his hands.

Kurt took Adam’s hands and moisturized them, and then gently pushed his cuticles back. Afterwards, he put some cuticle oil on.
“Okay, you can think about whether you want them polished or not because that would be the next step.”

He went through the same moisturizing and cuticle treatment steps with Sebastian.

“I get why girls pay to have his done. It’s very relaxing,” Sebastian said. “I’ll have black polish if you have any. It will go with my effort of trying to get Isabelle to let me have the black jacket like the one Adam brought back today. I wonder if the black boots are still there.”

“I don’t honestly remember, but you should definitely check. Make sure you change into a pair of your Levi’s and don’t shave tomorrow morning. Oh, and wear a nice white t-shirt, not undershirt, if you have one. Otherwise, wear a nice pale solid colored t-shirt. Don’t show up in your dance class clothes.”

“Sure.”

“What about you, Adam? Nail polish or no?”

“Do Sebastian’s first and I’ll keep thinking about it.”

Kurt went down and brought the black nail polish back and put two coats on after the primer clear coat. Sebastian had closed his eyes. When Kurt finished he opened them.

“Well, it’s different. I think I can rock the look. Maybe it will help convince Isabelle.”

“What colors do you have besides black?” Adam asked. “I’m not sure I can rock the black like Sebastian.”

“Let me go look.” Kurt went down to his room and came back with a midnight blue and a plum so dark it was nearly black. “This is all I have. I let the girls take the colors I would never wear when they moved out of the loft.”

“Let’s try the really dark blue.”

“There’s always nail polish remover if you hate it,” Kurt said.

“Of course, love. Let’s do this.” He held his left hand out for Kurt to get started.

While he was working on Adam, Sebastian asked Kurt, “Are you going to paint yours?”

“I haven’t in a long time, but I’ll do mine black like yours. I know what I can wear to work tomorrow and get away with it.”

After he finished Adam’s he did his own manicure, while they sat around and talked.

“Are you sure? I can go sleep on the couch. I don’t mind.” Kurt said as he came out of the bathroom.

“It’s fine. I promise to not be offended by any snuggling that ends up happening.”

“I had Bruce for a reason.”

“I remember Bruce. But it’s fine, love. Just get in bed. I will live through being snuggled if it happens again.”
Kurt turned the light off and got in bed. He lay facing away from Adam in an attempt to give him space and try to stay on his own side of the bed.

The next morning, Kurt woke up snuggled up to Adam again. He scooted back gently, trying to keep from waking Adam up. Instead he heard Adam laughing quietly.

“Kurt, love. It’s fine. I quite like your snuggles.”

“God, it’s embarrassing.”

“Sam got used to it obviously.”

“He knew already. He had slept in my bed many, many times in high school. Blaine never knew of course because he would have had a cow. But Finn snores and sometimes Sam just couldn’t take it and he came in my room and got in bed with me. He said that he much preferred being snuggled over being awakened on and off all night by Finn’s snoring.”

Adam laughed. “I can’t even imagine how you got away with that.”

“I was an early riser back then too and Sam would go back into Finn’s room and shower and no one was ever the wiser. Our rooms were upstairs and my dad and Carole’s room was downstairs. My dad would have been really confused if he had found me snuggling Sam in my bed back then. He’s gotten better about stuff. I think he was a lot more concerned that I would be a one-night-stand guy than he was about me being gay. I think he had this notion that all gay guys are like that. His version of the sex talk was about me not throwing myself around and respecting myself.”

“I think a lot of people have that view of gay men and it’s pretty rightfully earned by the ones who behave that way. They’re more visible, they’re public, and they get attention. Those of us who enjoy monogamous relationships are not noticeable like that. We’re just hanging out in our apartments watching TV snuggled up on the couch with our boyfriends. But there’s a difference between not wanting to be monogamous and throwing yourself around. It’s judgmental to decide that someone else’s life choices are less acceptable. If both parties are willing participants, then it’s not a lesser lifestyle choice. Some people try it out when they’ve lived in places where they had no opportunity to date and they move some place with a lot of gay guys. And some of those people find they like the lifestyle of no commitment. Some people find they like it for a while. Some people find they don’t like it at all.”

“Did you go through a period like that? I’ve often wondered if I missing out on something or if there’s something wrong with me because it doesn’t even appeal to me to give it a try.”

“I did. Someone hooked me up with a fake ID after I got here. The accent and looking a bit older than some of the people my age helped me get into the bars. I had my share of one-night-stands my first year. All consensual. All safe. I learned that it’s not really me. I went back to monogamous dating again and preferred that over hooking up.”

“Am I weird that it’s never appealed to me at all?”

“I don’t think so. You’re a very private person. I think the people who enjoy that lifestyle are more open with their desires and they’re just less reserved. I think that you wouldn’t really enjoy having sex in public even with someone you’d been with for years. I think you’d want to have the privacy of your own space. For a lot of people sex is really physical and the emotional aspect of it isn’t what drives them. But I think that’s not true about you. So, it doesn’t surprise me that hooking up
doesn’t appeal to you. But I also don’t think that makes you boring or a prude like I’m sure you’ve been called, at least by Santana.”

“Thank you.”

“I think prude is just a word used to shame people in the way that people use the word slut to shame people. Asexual and demi-sexual people don’t view sex the way other people do and that’s not something they should be shamed for. If a person doesn’t feel sexual attraction to people, shaming them for it is just silly. If they don’t feel sexual attraction until after they’ve become close to the person emotionally, that’s no reason to shame them. Plenty of people are sexually attracted to other people and are willing to have sex with them based on that alone. And society pretty much considers that to be normal. But people who don’t feel like that aren’t prudes. They’re just people who don’t feel that way.”

“I think I need to do more reading. Sebastian was talking about all of these different words for love in Greek and I looked those up and it was interesting. You’re using words I’ve sort of heard a few times and others I’ve never heard. I have more to learn.”

“But what you were asking me about whether I think it’s weird that you’re not interested in hooking up – the simple answer to that is no. I don’t think you’re weird. Some people just know they won’t like something while other people want to try things out to see if they like it. Others are sure they will like it without having to try it first. I know it sounds strange, but think of bungee jumping. Some people know they won’t like it, some people don’t know, other people are certain that they will. The first group won’t ever do it. People in the second group would possibly do it if given the chance. And people in the third group find a way to do it. Entomophagy is the same way.”

“Ento-what?”

“Eating bugs.”

“Ew.”

“See. Some people know for certain they wouldn’t even try one. Other people don’t know whether they’d like them, but would give it a chance. While some people go out and look for some to try as soon as they hear that they are edible. And not every person who thinks bungee jumping sounds amazing thinks that eating bugs sounds cool. I’m sure there are people who are willing to try everything new, but it’s more typical that people would have some things they’d definitely want to try and others that they wouldn’t even consider. Having a one-night stand doesn’t appeal to you and you know that about yourself. That’s fine. It doesn’t make you weird. It makes you not interested in casual sex. It doesn’t make a good or bad person any more than not wanting to go bungee jumping makes someone a good or bad person.”

“That’s how I’ve felt, but you’re the first person who seems to agree with me. Other people make it out like I just don’t know how to relax and have a good time.”

“Relaxing and having a good time don’t necessarily involve having sex.”

“Tell that to the people I grew up around.”

“I’ve met a few of them.”

“Santana virgin-shamed Finn into having sex with her.”

“Wow.”
“Yeah. He regretted giving in to her. And then like 9 or 10 months later, she used it to tear his relationship with Rachel apart by telling Rachel. I mean he lied to Rachel about being a virgin, but Santana was pretty messed up in what she did. Then about, less than a year later, he outed her and someone overheard it and it ended up in a TV commercial for a political campaign to hurt the cheer coach – that she had a lesbian head cheerleader. Santana’s grandma didn’t speak to her for three years.”

“Your choir was like a soap opera.”

“Exactly. Which I think is part of why I’m a mixed-up mess sometimes. Those 10 people, more or less, were my only friends, ever. So, Santana’s insanity was part of my normal. Quinn cheated on Finn. Finn cheated on Quinn. Finn cheated with Quinn when she was dating Sam. Santana used her body to manipulate jocks. I think I’m the only long-term male member of the group that never had sex with Brittany or Santana or both.”

“Insanity.”

“And then I went to NYADA and met the likes of Rachel’s sycophants and the others like them. And by that summer, the rest of the Lima crew started finding their way to New York. But I met you and you weren’t like them. It was incredibly confusing. You were kind, truthful, and supportive. You didn’t manipulate, but I didn’t know what that was like, so I assumed that you were, but that you were just better at it? I’m not even able to explain it well. I wanted to believe it was true, but I had no experience that lead me to believe that was a real possibility. I know I’ve told you before, but I just didn’t know how to break free. I would have cost me everything and so I lost myself instead of losing them. They seemed to function in the dysfunction, so I felt like I was the one … It’s pointless to discuss now. I’m just really sorry, Adam. I hope you don’t go back to England sorry that you let me back into your life. I’m sorry that I still can’t be – that I’m still not a whole person yet. I still can’t accept compliments. I don’t know how. You’re such a great person and I really hope you find someone as great as you are some day. Let’s go eat breakfast. I’ll make you whatever you’d like.” Kurt hopped up out of the bed and left the room, not giving Adam any time to say anything.

Kurt finished drying the skillet and put it back away. “So, you pick. I’ll go out or stay in and do anything you choose. I want you to enjoy your last few days here.”

“Well, I mean, I’m already getting to live in the lap of luxury. You cook for me, take my to Vogue and triple the value of my entire wardrobe with some amazing new items. You gave me a manicure and a facial. I mean it’s like a five-star resort here. Oh, I can’t forget the bonus snuggles.”

Kurt tickled him. Adam defended himself and tickled Kurt back.

“We missed doing yoga by sleeping in so late. I never sleep that late.”

“Let’s just go back to Central Park. It’s not that hot outside yet and I will miss the green space and the sun.”

“Central Park it is.”

Adam brought the book that Kurt had loaned Sebastian and Kurt brought Sebastian’s book to the park. They found a bench in the shade and read. After an hour or so, Adam said, “I’d like to take
you to lunch to this place that sells the most fantastic wraps. You can pick anything you can imagine and I’m sure they have it.”

“Sounds delicious. Lead the way.”

They both stood and Kurt put their books in his satchel. Kurt linked his arm around Adam’s and they walked to the subway. They walked a few blocks after they got off to get to the restaurant. When they got inside, they stood back from the line for a few minutes while Kurt surveyed the menu board.

“Pineapple? I know some people like it on pizza, but in a wrap?”

“I bet it tastes good with …” he looked through the menu board choices. “Ham or pulled pork, Swiss or provolone, caramelized onions, and the cilantro rice.”

“I suppose. Grapes?”

“Hmm.” He looked at the choices again. “Chicken salad, shredded romaine lettuce, celery, and walnuts?”

“I’m obviously not thinking outside the box enough. You seem quite good at it.”

“I’ve obviously not thinking outside the box enough. You seem quite good at it.”

“I see.”

“The price is decent and the variety is amazing. I would have brought you here earlier, but as you saw it’s nowhere near the NYADA campus, the retirement home, or Vogue. I never managed to find a time to get you here. When we’ve gone sightseeing on the weekends, you’ve always packed the most wonderful lunches for all of us, so there was no need to go out to eat. But I’ve eaten more than my fair share of these delicious concoctions for dinner over the past year.”

“It’s not far from where you were living.”

“A ten-minute walk.”

“Convenient and tasty. A dangerous combination.” Kurt looked around. It had an industrial chic feel to it. Exposed ductwork along the outer walls. Visible pipes. Everything was metallic. Metal hanging lamps. Stainless tabletops with wood chairs. And what appeared to be ‘found’ and repurposed art.

“And reasonably priced compared to most places. I’d have a piece of fruit to go with it and call it a night.”

“Are you ready to get in line?”

“I am.”

They waited in line and ordered.

“I’ll have chicken salad, shredded romaine lettuce, chopped celery, crumbled walnuts, and sliced grapes,” Kurt said.

“And I’ll have the pulled pork, shredded provolone, caramelized onions, cilantro rice, and pineapple.”
Kurt laughed. “What you suggested sounded good to both of us?”

“It’s something I had never tried. But when I tried to think of what would go with pineapple, then it sounded good. We’ll see.”

They scooted down. Adam paid and they waited for his name to be called. He grabbed the sack and they found a place to sit.

“Grab that table and I’ll go get us some napkins and some water to drink.”

Kurt took the sack and sat down. Adam put their drinks down and sat across from him. He put the napkins in the middle. Kurt handed him his wrap. Before he took a bite, he cut the end off and put it on a napkin for Adam to try.

“You came up with it, so you should at least get to try it.”

Adam smiled and picked the section up and popped it in his mouth. After he swallowed, he said, “Well, I like it. Try it.”

Kurt picked it up and took a bite. He nodded after he tasted it. “It’s actually really good. What about yours? Do you like it?”

Adam cut a section of his off for Kurt and put it on a napkin. “You try it too. Then you’ll know whether to get it if you ever come back here.”

Kurt picked it up and put it in his mouth. Adam took a bite at the same time.

“Oh, I like that too. A lot more than I thought I would,” Kurt said.

“Me too. It’s a good combination.”

“What’s the first thing you’re going to do when you get back to England?”

“ Mostly just head straight to the theatre after I unpack in the flat I’m sharing with several other people. My understudy has been filing in for me last week and this week. We have previews this coming week and our official opening will be a week from this Friday. It’s a 12-week run, so the final shows will be the last weekend in August.”

“Then what happens?”

“Well, either that’s the end or someone sees it and picks it up and we move to a bigger theater and we have a longer run.”

“Will you stay with the show or let it go?”

“I guess that depends on where it goes. I’m not all that interested in moving to Chicago or San Francisco, although the weather in California would be nice.”

“I can understand that. Speaking of plays, I have to audition for the fall play and the spring musical next year. I’m hoping to get a speaking part at least. I also have to figure out how to survive. I can’t keep working from 2-6 at Vogue and go to rehearsals. But I also can’t work from 9-1 because I’ll have morning classes. It’s time for me and my financial planner to have a sit down meeting.” He laughed.

“Why is that funny?”
“I can’t afford a financial planner. I do my own planning, so it’s me telling myself to come up with ways to spend less while I remind myself that I have to eat.”

“I see. Well, be sure and stick up for yourself on that point. Eating is crucial.”

“I’m going to basically beg Isabelle to keep me on for 10 hours a week and let me train her next PA. If I quit working there, I’d have to go back to working as a barista or a waiter. I guess I could see if the Copper Cup has any openings on their early morning shift. At least I know the manager there gives set shifts and not willy-nilly random hours like I had at the diner. And Sam makes decent tips. I might be able to work 6-10 in the mornings and still have time to get all of my classes and rehearsals in during the rest of the day. It would still be a pay cut, causing me to have to work more hours than the 10 I could get by on at Vogue.”

“Sebastian’s not charging you an arm and a leg to rent your room is he?”

“He’s actually just letting me and Sam live with him for free right now. We pay for Netflix and I already had Amazon Prime for the year. And we’ve covered the increase in his water and electric since we moved in. I haven’t told anyone, but last fall when I withdrew from the internship and I enrolled in two online courses through the portal, I had to pay for those credits out of pocket and I didn’t have enough to cover any of it. While I was in Ohio, I wasn’t making any money. I put the tuition on my emergency credit card that had already seen a few emergencies after everyone left and I was alone in the loft. And I also had to buy the books I needed for those courses. I used the money I had made in December to pay for my books for this semester and I divided up what I owed on my emergency card by five and I’ve paid that each month since I’ve been here, so I will have that paid off when I get paid this Friday. And I didn’t have to take out a loan for housing this semester. But now, I need to put back what I make over the summer with what I have actually managed to save in order to offset my costs for next year. And I’ve been second guessing myself on taking the camp position because it’s unpaid and I could have worked a second job this summer if I had just taken one class. But now, I’m booked every weekday morning for most of the summer. I just feel like all I do is choose between surviving and actually doing what I came her to do. It feels like I’m never going to do both. I’m sorry. I’ll stop. This was not the topic I meant to discuss at all.” Kurt took a breath. “I want to enjoy the time I have with you, so forget all that. Have you seen pictures of the set and stuff for your play? Does it look like you had imagined it would?”

“It does. I’ve had quite a bit of input into it through pictures and Skype. I love Skype.”

“I really want to see it. Make sure it gets recorded somehow.”

“I will. If you end up doing any kind of performing with this camp thing you’re doing, get someone to record you too. I’ll miss hearing you sing.”

“Why don’t you ask Sam when he’s here this weekend about audio files if you want to hear me sing.”

“Sam has audio files of you singing?”

“Not recent ones, but yes. When we first met, I wanted to sing a duet with him in Glee Club and I sent him a whole bunch of audio files trying to convince him that he should sing with me. He still has them.”

“You tried to convince him to sing with you? Shouldn’t it have been the other way around? You’re fantastic.”

“He was the cute, straight, transfer student who had just made quarterback. I was the lowest of the
low on the social scale at the school. He didn’t realize that. I called it off because Finn rightfully pointed out that I would have just been putting a bulls-eye on Sam’s back. He was new. He didn’t need to be associated with me. Anyway, enough of that story. Sam has the audio files. He also has quite a few video files from high school on his phone.”

“I actually know what I want to do before I leave, but I need to call someone to arrange it.”

“Alright. Your wish is my command.”

“Oh, is it?”

“Of course.”

“Hmm. I’ll have to think about it.”

Kurt finished eating. Adam had already finished while Kurt was talking. Once Kurt finished, he grabbed their trash and got up to toss it. Adam was right behind him when he turned around.

“Ready, then?”

“Yes. I’ll show you around this area for a little bit and then I know you need to catch the subway to head back toward Vogue.”

Sebastian was sitting in Kurt’s office when he arrived.

“Well, good afternoon Sebastian. Are you here vying for my job?”

He chuckled. “There is zero chance that Isabelle would hire me to do your job.”

Isabelle came in behind Kurt. “Sebastian’s right. I love him, but no way would I hire him to do your job. I need you for that. He’s here waiting for you to take him down to the vault. I’m running late from this morning and I have to eat something. You go let him in and start looking over today’s schedule and find something I can put off until tomorrow. I’ll come down there as soon as I eat.”

“I can do that.” Kurt grabbed his iPad. “After you.”

Sebastian got out of his chair and walked down to the vault.

“So, she said yes?”

“She did. She also said I could have a pair of the new jeans and you too.”

Kurt opened the vault and went straight to where the leather jacket was hanging and handed it to Sebastian. While he was putting it on, Kurt went and looked through the boots and found the ones that went with the jacket still there. He handed them to Sebastian. “The Levi’s and white t-shirt look good on you. And they make a perfect bad boy 50s look to go with the retro-styled jacket. See if the boots fit.”

Sebastian put them on and laced them up. “They fit.”

“It’s a good look on you. Go look in the three-way mirror.”

“I like them. What would you pick in here?”
“Honestly, I’m not trying to collect a lot more clothes right now, but we have those Frye leather bags that were used last spring for the fall photos shoots. I like that small charcoal one. And the smaller laptop bag in the dark brown matches the jacket Adam took and the small black one that would hold an iPad looks great with what you have on, plus it’s just really cool period. I like the buckles on it.”

“Will you show me?”

“Sure. I’ll grab them.” Kurt grabbed all three bags and showed them to him.

Sebastian put the black one on. “I’m more accustomed to a backpack, but I can see the appeal to this. Sitting down on the subway would be a lot easier. I’m not sure how much I would use one.”

“Me either. I use my blue one all the time, but I just really like the look of that charcoal leather one with the burnished stainless accents. Anyway, you can wait here for Isabelle to approve your choices. I need to go talk to someone to move something to tomorrow like she wanted.”

When Kurt went back to Isabelle’s office, Sebastian was gone. “Are you ready for your 2:30 meeting? Everyone’s in the conference room.”

“Yes, yes. I’m coming.”

“I moved your 2:00 to 4:00 and your 4:00 to tomorrow. I updated your afternoon calendar. You can check it while you’re in the meeting.”

“Thank you.” She picked up what she needed from her desk and went to the conference room.

Kurt went back to his office to make phone calls.

When he got back to the apartment that evening, Adam and Sebastian had dinner ready to eat. He changed quickly and returned to the table to sit down to eat with them.

“This looks great. Thanks for cooking.” Kurt began assembling his first fajita.

“You’re welcome,” Sebastian said. “Adam had everything sliced up and ready to go when I got home.”

“I have a great evening planned,” Adam said.

“Ooh. Do tell.”

“Games, lots of games – like you mentioned last night. I went through your shelf in your room. I’ve never played some of them. It will be a learning adventure.”

“I love playing board games and card games. I know most people our age like video games more, but I really dislike screaming and that’s what always went on. Smack talk and yelling. Neither of which are my idea of fun. With board games and card games, you can actually still talk to the people you’re playing with.”

“I didn’t have gaming system. I was a nerd and read books.”

“I herded sheep in my spare time,” Adam said.
“You did not,” Kurt countered.

“Fine, I didn’t.” Adam laughed. “But the neighbors did have two sheep. And my mum has pictures of me as a toddler trying to get them to listen to me and do tricks like our dog.”

“That’s cute,” Kurt said. “What are we playing first?”

“Scattergories,” Sebastian said. “One day the two of us will play in French. It will get you to build your vocabulary.”

“We should take ‘Things in a Kitchen’ and ‘Part of a Car’ out of the deck next time,” Sebastian teased.

“Now, now. You beat us at Uno several times. Be a good sport. Plus, when we play in French, you will beat me easily.”

“Your French is perfect.”

“That may be true, but me not having lived with someone who spoke French after the age of 8, gives you a huge advantage. I don’t know the names of all sorts of every day things that no one ever writes about or mentions in the books I’ve read. Like I have no idea the name for a phillips head screw and a regular screw. I don’t know the specific term for needle nose pliers. I don’t know lots of every day things.”

“I probably don’t either and I lived in France most of my life, but I never fixed anything or needed to know the difference between things like that. I guess that’s not true anymore. I lived in France for 10 years, which isn’t most of my life anymore since I will be 22 in July.”

Kurt finished putting all of the Scattergories stuff in the box and put the top on. “What’s next?”

Adam answered, “I’m going to teach you how to play Whist, but not until Friday because we need four people.”

“Okay.”

“So, Poker or Blackjack?” Adam asked.

Kurt came out of the bathroom, turned the lights off and got in bed without questioning Adam about sleeping on the couch.

Adam said, “I have a question for you.”

“Sure.”

“Have you snuggled other people platonically besides Sam?”

“I have. Sebastian. When he came back from France after his grandfather died. He was really sad.”

“So, just Sam and Sebastian.”

“Yes, if you mean snuggling in a bed. You and I basically snuggle on the couch when watching movies a lot of the time if we’re sitting next to each other. And I snuggle against both Sam and
Sebastian too, depending on how we’re sitting.”

“That’s true.”

“So, I want you to stop feeling bad about snuggling with me. After what you said this morning, I spent some time thinking. You seem to be concerned that I may regret you being part of my life again and there’s nothing farther from the truth. I was planning to look for you when I heard you were back at Thanksgiving. I just happened to run into you in the changing area before I had time to track you down. I want to be your friend, whether there is more than friendship ever or not. I actually quite enjoy your company. I don’t regret renewing our friendship one bit. You were honest with me up front about not being ready for a relationship. I knew that from the start. If I had only wanted that from you, that would have been the time to say that I wasn’t interested in a friends-only situation. I know you told me that the people you’ve spent most of your life around are manipulators. But you have also figured out that I am not one by now, at least I hope so.”

“I have.”

“I’m not going to lie to you and tell you that I don’t find you insanely attractive, but I would never overstep the lines of our friendship that I value greatly and attempt to force you into something you aren’t ready for or maybe won’t ever be interested in. I value you as a person too much to do that. I just need you to know that you hugging me or sleep-snuggling me or holding my hand sometimes does not make me flip to ‘Oh, now it’s okay to make a move on my friend.’ Even if we snuggle intentionally, that doesn’t give me the right to kiss you or touch you places friends don’t touch each other.”

“Okay.”

“Your boundaries have been trampled before. I know they have without asking or knowing the details. If you ever told me that you were ready to try dating again and we lived in the same area, I would ask you out and give you the chance to say yes or no. And I wouldn’t dump you as a friend if you said no.”

“Okay.”

“I’ve seen your former friends trample your boundaries. I’ve seen it more than once. That day we were watching Moulin Rouge and you started to cry. You tried to cover it up and Santana just blurted out private information that she had no right to share with me being a new person in your life. It was your place to tell me that kind of personal information IF you had wanted me to know it. And her telling me about the wedding hook-up – you and I weren’t exclusive. You and I weren’t even really dating, just hanging out together and getting to know each other. She had no right to tell me something so personal about you.”

“She has no qualms doing things like that. She is no longer in the group of people I consider friends. And to be honest, I’m not sure there was ever a point in time when we were actually friends. There were times when she wasn’t vicious and we got along, but I mistakenly saw that as friendship. I know you aren’t that kind of person, but I didn’t want to be a tease or lead you on in some way. I knew how you felt about me back then and you’ve never said that you feel differently now. I never wanted to give you mixed signals. I love being your friend. You are literally the only person who has ever attempted to be my friend just for me, not for something I can do and who has never hurt me. I’m glad Elliott’s back in my life and maybe he will be that kind of friend too. But initially he auditioned to be in the band I started, so there was another reason we spent time together other than to become friends. I didn’t get to spend much time alone with him since Santana and Rachel were part of the group at first, and then when they weren’t anymore, there were still the other band members. He and I got together and talked about music and set lists and
we went to the music store together, which was a lot of fun. But our friendship was still at the surface level because me spending time with other guys alone was really problematic.”

“I get that. No need to explain that any further.”

“So, you hold this place in my heart that’s so special. I don’t want to lose that. And that doesn’t mean that you’ve been friend-zoned. It just means that I never wanted to ruin that by giving you mixed signals and upsetting the balance of our friendship when I wasn’t ready for anything beyond friendship. Six months into being single, I feel like I’ve finally mastered the art of being friends with people. Actually being friends. Not wondering if you or Sebastian or Sam are secretly manipulating me. Or if one of you is feeding information about my life to people I’ve cut out of my life. I’ve finally gotten over feeling paranoid all the time. The feeling hasn’t gone away completely obviously because the person causing it is still here and intermittently spying on me. But that is becoming more and more irrelevant. He is no longer relevant and the people he’s misinforming or allowing to believe things that aren’t true are no longer relevant, so overall it just doesn’t matter like it used to.”

“I’m glad to hear that. Really glad. I want you to be happy and content and full of joy. And I think you’re finding your way there. And I’m glad to be on that journey with you. And as much as possible, given the situation, I want us to have fun and enjoy our time together, just like you said earlier, but that doesn’t mean that I want you to pretend to be happy. I’m going to miss you terribly. You and Sebastian and Sam are my closest friends here. And I’ve enjoyed all of the time we’ve spent together over the last six months. And if you don’t feel uncomfortable, I would actually enjoy a snuggle with you while you’re awake. No funny business. I told you I won’t overstep our friendship and I know you won’t. So, if you’re okay with it, I would love to snuggle as friends, like you do with Sam.”

“Alright.” He waited for Adam to turn on his side and scooted up behind him and wrapped his arm around Adam’s chest.

Sebastian had already left for NYADA when Kurt and Adam got up.

“Yoga? We didn’t oversleep too much this morning.”

“Sure, love. Yoga sounds good.”

After they finished, Kurt made them breakfast and they decided to spend the morning at the New York Aquarium, which was one of the places that Adam had wanted to visit that they had never gotten to on their sightseeing list. They left the apartment before 8:30 to make sure they were at the aquarium before it opened.

They went to the morning feedings and watched the penguins, sea lions, and otters get fed.

“Oh, my God,” Kurt said. “Those faces. That’s the job I want. I want to feed those adorable animals and have them look at me with those faces. They are SO cute. Like ridiculously cute. It would be so silly, but if all of the world’s issues had been solved and I had a ton of money, I would put an otter habitat in my house. Right through the middle, so they could like swim around and play and I could watch them.”

“You’re in love.”

“I am. I need an otter. No, a pair of otters. I wouldn’t want just one. It might get lonely. Maybe
four. Then they could all be friends.”

Adam wrapped his arm around Kurt’s waist. “If I ever get rich enough to solve the world’s problems, the very next thing I will do is get your four otters and build them a habitat.”

Kurt leaned over and put his head on Adam’s shoulder. “Thank you for not teasing me. They’re just so sweet looking.”

“They are. And I would never tease you about finding something cute. They are adorable. I bet they’re little mischief makers though.”

“Probably, but their cuteness outweighs the risk. You’ll just have to hire a professional otter habitat builder for me.”

“I will definitely do that.”

“Let’s keep looking. I want to see the other animals and fish.”

They looked through as much as they could before Kurt had to leave for work. He left Adam’s lunch with him and he ate his own on his walk back to the subway. He got to work on time and took a seat at his desk, but was looking at one of the otter pictures instead of Isabelle’s schedule when she came in.

“What’s so interesting on your phone?”

He turned it around so she could see. “They are adorable. You went to the aquarium this morning?”

“I did. It was on Adam’s list of places he wanted to go before he went back to England and we hadn’t made it there yet. He stayed behind to look around more. But the otters and sea lions were adorable. And when I have ended war, poverty, discrimination, and the whole world can be as educated as they’d like at no cost, I’m getting four pet otters to live in the habitat that I will build in my house.”

“I see.”

“So, that will be really soon, I’m sure.” He picked his iPad up. “So, today you have meetings, quite a few.”

She laughed. “You’re so helpful.”

“I know.”

She put a sack on the edge of his desk. “You three can have the Frye bags. They’re in this sack.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes. I asked around to be certain. I got a lot of ‘those are nice, but I like my briefcase or bag I already have’ answers. Women change purses when they go out, but not that many people want to move their work stuff to a new bag all the time. They find one they like and stick with it for a long time. Plus, the black and charcoal ones are not large enough for a laptop.”

“Thank you. I really like the charcoal one. It’s just that right size between big enough to be a bag for school and too small to be masculine and looks like a purse. My iPad and a book will fit. Even my lunch will fit if I pack it right.”

“Well, I hope you get a lot of use out of it. It’s a lovely bag. Now, meetings for me. And phone
calls and meetings for you. I need you to be ready to help me with that Benetton selection this afternoon.”

“I can do that.”

When he got off that afternoon, he transferred his items from his blue messenger bag that he had been carrying for years to the new charcoal Frye bag that he had be given. Everything fit nicely and stayed in place because the bag had divided sections and pockets to keep everything organized. He put the blue bag into the sack and headed downstairs.

When he exited the elevator, he was surprised to find Sebastian waiting for him. “I actually have something for you from Isabelle.” He opened the sack and pulled the black leather bag out and handed it to Sebastian.

“You have the charcoal one. Is the dark brown one in the bag?”

“It is. She gave them to me today. She asked around and they’re ours.”

He walked over to a bench in the lobby and sat down. He opened his backpack and started transferring the stuff from it to the new satchel. “I don’t carry my laptop around. I bought a Bluetooth keyboard case for my iPad and I just use that when I’m out. I just send myself the files and work on them on my laptop at home.” When he finished putting his stuff in, he said, “It holds more than I thought it would. This is really nice. I won’t ever need another bag again. It’s like professional looking while still being really cool and not stuffy looking.”

“I agree. I still have a more business-looking satchel that I originally had in high school and it would be perfect for a business job where I used a full-sized laptop and took it back and forth with me to work. But it’s a little long for textbooks and it’s too narrow to use for NYADA. I can’t fit any clothes in it or anything. But I really like this one. It’s like the perfect size for every day and it’s less casual than the blue one I’ve been carrying forever, well probably five years. Like you said, they look professional, but not stuffy. I like the straps and burnished stainless fasteners. It looks good with jeans and hoodies, but will also look fine with a suit, whereas my blue one was always just too casual for a lot of my suit jackets, but I was holding out to find something I really liked because they are so crazy expensive. And I like this because I wear a lot of black, but I just really love the charcoal. Why are you here anyway and where are we going?”

“Oh, we’re meeting Adam for dinner. He had a meeting and he didn’t want to go all the way back to the apartment and then back towards where he already was.” He put his backpack in the sack, stood up, and they headed towards the door.

“Makes sense.” Kurt’s phone rang, startling him.

Sebastian laughed at him.

“Hello?”

“Maggie?”

“Yes, of course. I’ll be right over. It will take me less than 15 minutes.”

“Maggie, as in your pal at the retirement home?”

“She says I left a book there. I don’t remember anything being missing, but as you heard, I told her
that I would come get it.”

“Well, let’s head to the Lexington House then.”

“She said that she’s sitting in the performance area.”

“That will make her easy to find.”

“How was your class today? What did everyone think of your translation?”

“SURPRISE!!”

Kurt could not have looked any more shocked.

“Dad!” He propelled himself into Burt’s arms. “Who planned this?”

“Sam?” He hugged Sam next.

He spent the next several minutes mingling through the room. Carole was standing off to the side. He saw her and walked up and wrapped his arms around her. “Thank you for coming. This is a huge surprise.”

“You’re welcome, honey. I’m sorry I dropped out of your life again. I’m seeing someone new and I’ve decided to give antidepressants a try. Therapy alone just wasn’t cutting it.”

“I hope it’s helping.”

“It is. I’m feeling more human.”

“Good. I’ve missed you.” He hugged her again.

“Go talk to your friends. We’re staying the night. We only have this room for an hour.”

“Okay, but come with me.”

She followed along. He took her around the room and greeted all of the Apples that had come and he introduced her to everyone as his mom, Carole. He grabbed Burt along the way and introduced them both as his parents. Once he had been around and talked to most everyone, someone in the group started belting out “Happy Birthday”. It was, by far, the most melodic version of the song he had ever heard.

“Thank you.”

Adam and Sebastian disappeared, then reappeared carrying a birthday cake. It was decorated with music notes.

Sam said, “Alright. Kurt, come cut the cake so we can eat it.” He handed Kurt a knife.

Sebastian managed to get a few pictures of him right before and as he started to cut it. He stepped toward the table and started distributing slices of cake as Kurt cut them. People took their slices and sat around all of the tables that had been set up. Once everyone had a piece, Kurt went back to mingling and spending time at each table talking to everyone.

He leaned over and whispered in Sam’s ear. “This was your idea, wasn’t it?”
“Actually, it was Sebastian’s. Adam and I just helped with the contacts. I got your parents to come and helped them find a decent cheap hotel. And Adam invited all of the Apples to come. Sebastian came here in person and enlisted Maggie’s help to get your friends here to come and he got them to let us use the room for an hour. The six of us are going out to dinner after this.”

“Six?”

“Me, you, Sebastian, Adam, and your parents.”

“Got it. I won’t say anything to anyone and if anyone asks, I’ll say I already have dinner plans. And I’m so glad to see you. Thank you for driving here.”

“Of course. Now, get back to mingling.”

As the hour passed, he talked to everyone for at least a few minutes, not wanting to leave anyone out. When there was about 10 minutes left, the Apples and Adam moved to the stage area of the room. They performed their rendition of “Baby Got Back” much to Burt, Carole, Elliott, Sam, and Sebastian’s amusement. They even had Miss July laughing. The older people in the crowd eventually caught onto the lyrics and feigned shocked, but laughed along with everyone else. The Apples bowed and wished Kurt a happy birthday and headed out together, except Adam. Elliott hugged Kurt and followed them out.

The orderlies started collecting up residents of the center. The ones that could walk started to leave as well. They waved and patted him on the shoulder as they left. Sebastian offered the few pieces of leftover cake to the staff and they gladly took them and ate them.

What Kurt hadn’t seen was that there was a basket on one of the tables. Sebastian went over and collected the cards out of it and gave them to Kurt. He took them and put them in his new satchel.

“So, are we ready to go have dinner?” Burt asked as he walked up to the two of them.

“We just ate cake,” Kurt said.

“Well, we’re walking to the restaurant. Our reservation is for 8:00. That gives you at least 45 minutes to get hungry, but probably more like an hour because I doubt we get served before 8:30.”

Kurt laughed. “Sure, Dad. I’ll be hungry in an hour. Let’s go.”

“I can’t believe you drove all the way here,” Kurt said.

“Where we live now is closer. It was less than 7 hours.”

“But still.”

“But nothing. You haven’t been home on your birthday since graduation weekend. I wasn’t missing your birthday a third year in a row.”

“Thanks for coming. It was a great surprise. Sebastian knows how to throw a surprise party. That’s for sure.”

Sebastian said, “I had help.”

Kurt walked between Carole and Burt and told them about the camp he was starting at the following week.

“Oh, Adam!”
“Yeah?”

“Stop for a sec.” He caught up with him. He opened the sack he was carrying and pulled out the satchel. “It matches your jacket and boots. Isabelle said you could have it.”

“It’s lovely. I’ll have to thank her somehow.” He took it and adjusted the strap and put it on. “It’s fantastic. Very professional, but stylish. I love it. Really.”

“She gave me the small charcoal one as you can see. And Sebastian got the small black one.”

“I did notice that he had a new bag, but hadn’t thought about it. I didn’t see these when we were there. I was focused on the suits mostly. And then once she said I could have the leather jacket and the boots, I was in too much shock to look around. But I love it. I’ll definitely take care of them. The jacket and bag should last a lifetime.”

“Let’s get walking again.” They caught up with everyone else quickly because they had stopped at a crosswalk waiting for the two of them.

When they got to the restaurant, Kurt was surprised to find Isabelle waiting for them at their table. “Isabelle?”

“Surprise! You didn’t think I would forget your birthday, did you? I just couldn’t leave the office in time to make it to the retirement home.”

“Isabelle, there are my parents, Burt and Carole.”

“It’s nice to finally meet you,” Carole said. “Kurt has said so many nice things about you.”

Burt reached out and shook her hand. “He enjoys working for you. It’s nice to meet you. I’m glad you could join us.”

“Isabelle is Sebastian’s second cousin. And I don’t think you’ve officially met Sebastian. I’m sure you did at the party, but he’s the one that came up with the idea of surprising me and managed to pull it off.”

“That’s quite a feat, you know. He’s like a bloodhound. Your secret keeping skills are quite good.”

“I just planned when he wasn’t around. And I had accomplices.”

“Speaking of accomplices, you probably met Adam too, but this is a more proper introduction.”

Burt shook Adam’s hand. “I don’t think we did actually meet at the party. It’s nice to meet you. Kurt has said a lot of nice things about you as well.”

“Well, the feeling is mutual. And Sebastian was the mastermind behind the party, but I did help round up some of the guests.”

“Thank you,” Kurt said. “It was a lot of fun. I’ve never had a big party like that before.”

They looked through their menus and placed their orders when the waiter came.

“Alright, gift time,” Carole said. She handed him a small box.

He opened it. “Oh, wow. I love it. This was on my wish list from ages ago.”
“And I bought it ages ago. I just misplaced it and when we moved, I found it and kept it to give it to you for your birthday. If it doesn’t fit your style anymore, that’s okay. I can still exchange it.”

“No. I love it. It’s perfect.”

Adam leaned over to see it. Kurt offered the box to him and he looked at it and smiled. He passed it around the table. When it got back to Kurt, he took it out of the box and put it on. He slipped it off and adjusted the band and put it back on.

“It’s perfect. I wanted a stainless men’s watch like the ones that were popular in the 60’s, but they were way out of my budget range, like $3000 too much. So, I started looking at modern watches and I found this one. It’s the size of the smaller men’s watches I liked and you can’t even see the Mickey ears unless you’re really close to it. So, from a distance, it looks like a regular men’s dress watch, but I can see the Mickey ears every time I look at it. It’s perfect. Thank you.”

“I’m glad you still like it.”

“Mine’s next,” Isabelle handed him a small package.

“You didn’t need to get me anything.”

“Nonsense. Open it.”

He opened the box. “Where did you find ones with the silver frame?”

“A fairy godmother cannot reveal her secrets.”

“There perfect.” Kurt slipped the Prada Linea Rossa sunglasses on. “I love the gray gradient lenses. Thank you.” He slipped them in the case they came with and put the case in his satchel.

“You’re welcome.”

“There’s one last one from the three of us.” Adam handed him an envelope.

He opened it and there was a ticket to Luna Park. “You guys bought my ticket for Coney Island for Saturday? Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” they said in near unison.

“Dad, you guys aren’t going to try to drive back tonight are you?”

“No. We have a room booked for tonight. We’ll leave after lunch tomorrow so we can drive back in the daylight.”

“Good. I’m glad you came.”

“So, you four are going to Coney Island?” Carole asked.

“Yes, on Saturday. We made a list about five months ago of places that we wanted to go to that we had either never been to or had been to but really wanted to go back to. My list was just places I had never been. Sam started taking every other Saturday off and worked a double shift on Sundays and the four of us have been going to one of the places ever other weekend. We put Coney Island at the end because we wanted it to be warm when we went. And this weekend is supposed to be perfect. Lower to mid 80s for the high.”

“Sounds like fun,” Burt said. “I’m glad you’re doing things you want this time around. The
previous couple of years all you did was work and go to school.”

“We’ve been having fun. Adam and I went to the aquarium this morning. It’s one of the places we hadn’t managed to see. I had to go to work still, but he stayed after I left. And given my gift, I’m guessing that he went down to the park and bought our tickets before he came back.”

“I did. I figured it would save us time Saturday morning.”

“I’m sure it will.”

Carole said, “Tell us about your play that’s being staged in London. You must be so excited.”

Adam told them about it and answered their questions. By the time he had finished, the waiter brought out their food.

They all enjoyed what they had ordered and continued to talk while they ate. When they were finished, Isabelle insisted on taking Burt and Carole with her in the town car that was picking her up so they wouldn’t have to take a taxi to back to their hotel. The four guys took the subway back and walked the rest of the way back to the apartment.

When they arrived, Sam gave Kurt a big hug and turned to walk into the parking garage.

“Happy birthday. I hope you had a great day. I’ll be back the day after tomorrow. Coney Island here we come! I’m super excited.”

“You’re leaving?”

“Yeah. I parked my truck here in the garage. I have class in the morning, but I wouldn’t miss celebrating with you. I had coffee with dinner and plenty of sleep last night. I’m good. This time of night, it will only take about 45 minutes.”

Kurt hugged him again. “I’ll see you Friday. I’m really glad you came.”

The four of them walked over to the truck together. They waved as Sam drove out. The three of them went inside and went up to the apartment.

When they got inside, Kurt put the sack that he had been carrying down on the floor and wrapped his arms around Sebastian. “You are a sneaky friend. Thank you. That was really nice.” He stepped back. “I had a lot of fun. I can’t believe the three of you got so many people to come.”

Sebastian said, “Sometimes I really think you just don’t realize how many people actually really like you.”

Kurt took his shower first. He grabbed his new satchel and went to the living room and sat down on the sofa and opened it. He took out the cards that had been left for him. He opened the first card and found an arrow at the bottom pointing to the back. He turned the card over and Callie had written a personal note about something Kurt had done to brighten her day one time. He continued to open the cards. None of them contained anything, but each of them had a personalized note to him about something specific he had done for each person.

By the time he was finished, he could barely read and was holding the cards up, rather than closer
to his lap, to avoid getting tear drops on them. He stacked them up on the bookcase and went in the kitchen and got a ziplock bag and put all of the cards in the bag. He put the envelopes in their recycling bin. He sat back down on the sofa, turned the light off, and held the bag of cards in his hand.

Adam came down the hallway when he got out of the shower. “Kurt?”

“Yeah. I’m sitting in the living room.”

Adam could make him out in the dimness from the alcove light once he realized where he was. He walked toward the sofa and sat down. “Are you okay?”

“I … the cards. They, um.” He sniffed a bit. “They all had personal notes on them.”

“Ah, yes. Sebastian requested that people not bring gifts, just cards, so I made sure all of the Apples knew.”

“Did you ask them to write notes?”

“I did not, but it’s nice that they did.”

“I think maybe I’m wrong about myself, but I don’t know how to feel differently.”

“Can I go get Sebastian?”

“Yeah.”

Sebastian followed Adam back. “Scoot over so I can sit on one side and Adam can sit on the other.”

“He told me the cards had notes on them.”

“Yeah. I told him that I think maybe I’m wrong about myself, but I don’t know how to feel differently.”

Sebastian asked, “What do you mean?”

“Remember when I told you that Adam spent a lot of time trying to teach me to learn to accept a compliment and I told you that instead of learning how to accept them that I learned how to act like I had so that he would let the conversation move on?”

“I remember.”

“Oh, Kurt. I meant all of those things. I don’t even remember what they were, but they were honest statements.”

“I knew you thought they were, but I couldn’t believe them. I was used to praise and compliments only being given out as a way to get things from me. I knew you were being kind, and in a way I accepted them as true, from your point of view because I had never seen you be dishonest. But they didn’t ring true to me. Like I guess the best analogy is those dot tests they use at the optometrist where you have to identify the number to prove you’re not color blind. You would say things, and for you they were true. You could see the number 26. But no matter how hard I looked, I didn’t see any number at all – just the dots. So, I never felt like you were lying and I eventually came to see that you weren’t saying things to manipulate me, but I still couldn’t see them as true.”

Sebastian said, “This topic came up when I realized that I had apologized to Kurt, but I had not
explained that I had lied to him. So, I had apologized for saying hurtful things to him, but he still thought that I had meant what I said, but that I was sorry for saying them to him. When in reality the things I said were lies to intentionally hurt him and I was both sorry for lying and for hurting him on purpose. I contributed to his ongoing inaccurate beliefs about himself. He’s forgiven me and actually asked me not to bring it up again, but I knew you didn’t understand the context of this.

“Alright,” Adam said. “So, I know that people were unkind to you growing up. And I came along and said things that were true, but you didn’t accept them as true, but believed that I believed they were true. And now the cards?”

“There’s like 20 cards and they all say nice things. It’s kind of overwhelming. I told Sebastian that I didn’t know how to accept a compliment still. It was part of that same discussion. He had said something nice to me earlier in the day and I brushed it off, like I used to with you. He told me that it was hurtful for me to act that way when he was being sincere, but I thought he was just teasing me, so I brushed it off. Anyway with a whole stack of cards saying nice things, it’s just weird.”

Sebastian said, “You’re starting to be able to see that those of us who were mean to you were actually just being mean. That it wasn’t you who deserved to be treated that way because of something inherently dislikeable about you.”

“And you’re seeing that the newer people in your life actually see you as a really great guy?” Adam asked.

“Something like that.”

“Some of us who were jackasses before also think you’re a really great guy now,” Sebastian said. He reached out for Kurt’s hand. “Okay, maybe just one of us has come to our senses. But the truth is that you were a great guy then and I was a jackass. You smarted back, but you were defending yourself. You gave as good as you got, but if I hadn’t been poking at an injured person, you wouldn’t have lashed out at me with your words.”

“That’s true.”

“If we had just met somewhere, even at the Lima Bean, and it had just been the two of us and I had laid off the cocky attitude and just talked to you, we could have been friends from the start. We’ve talked about that.”

“I know.”

“So, these cards make you feel?” Adam asked.

“Like I am likeable and not just tolerable?”

“I merely told the Apples that are around for the summer that we were having a surprise birthday party for you, no gifts. I didn’t ask anyone to come. I mean of course I invited them, but I didn’t say it do anything beyond that.”

Adam insisted, “People do like you, Kurt.”

“I think the cards have done what all the months of therapy couldn’t. It will still take more time, but thank you.” He squeezed Sebastian’s hand. He reached out with his other hand and took Adam’s hand. He turned towards Adam. “And thank you for being there and being my friend and taking me back after walking away.”
“I don’t think you walked away. I think you were dragged away. But I’m glad we’re friends. All of us. And in the length of time that I’ve known you, Sebastian, I can’t even imagine you saying anything mean to Kurt. Really. If you hadn’t told me, I would have never known. You’ve changed a lot from back then.”

“Yeah. I was a mess back then. I don’t want to ever be like that again. And I don’t think I will. I’ve learned a lot about myself and how to deal with things differently than I did then.”

“I’ll keep working through this. I know it probably seems silly to the two of you, but it’s a fundamental shift in my thinking. Everyone compared me to Rachel. I’ve heard more times that I can recall that she and I were like two sides of the same coin. And she’s one of the most annoying people I know, even when we were friends, she was annoying. And most people barely put up with me. Everyone told me that I was lucky to find someone like Blaine. And the implication was always that someone so annoying should count their lucky stars to find someone willing to put up with them. One of the last things Santana practically yelled at me was how utterly intolerable I was and she walked away while Rachel stood there and said nothing. I have been on the outside, even in the only group of friends I ever had. The last week of school, Puck got all of the guys together in the locker room and gave out shot glasses. Not that I wanted or needed a shot glass, but I wasn’t included. I never was. I wasn’t a ‘guy’. I look in the mirror and I see this guy who tries to hard but never succeeds at fitting in. I see a guy who is utterly intolerable, but who people tolerate because of specific skills I have. People want to access my skills and so they tolerate me. Period. And a few people, like you two and Sam, acting differently than that wasn’t enough to shatter that intolerable reflection that I see. There were too many other voices I could still hear. But those cards, they tell a different story. I know the Apples have been nice all semester, but I guess it still just felt like when the football team didn’t have the guts to slushie me in my Cheerios uniform because they knew they’d endure the cheer coach’s wrath. And everyone loves you, Adam. And you liked me. So, it felt like they were nice because they wanted to stay in your good graces, but that wasn’t the truth. I appreciate you sitting with me, but I just need to go think for a while.” He squeezed both of their hands, stood up, went to the bedroom and got in bed.

A few minutes later, Adam came in the room and got in bed. “I quite enjoyed our friendly snuggle should you feel open to another one tonight. I’ll understand if you’d rather have your space. And if you want even more space, I can go make up the sofa and sleep there instead.”

“You don’t need to do that. You can stay here. I just need some time to think.”
Chapter 23

Thursday morning, Kurt woke up snuggling Adam again. He rolled back onto his own side of the bed.

“I was quite enjoying that snuggle that you just abruptly ended,” Adam teased, as he rolled onto his back as well.

“I know you have some plans for this morning, but do you have time for yoga before you run off?”

“I do.”

“Excellent. I’ll get the mats out.”

An hour later Kurt excited the subway at the nearest location to the hotel Burt and Carole were staying in. He walked the rest of the way and met them out front.

“Morning, bud. It’s good to see you.” Burt pulled him into a hug.

“You too, Dad.” Kurt stepped back and moved to Carole and hugged her. “Good morning.”

“Those sunglasses Isabelle gave you look good on you.”

“They do, don’t they,” he said tipping his nose slightly in the air and feigning being stuck up.

She laughed. “I’m glad you still like the watch. I was so aggravated when I couldn’t find it. And then it had been gone so long, I had quit even thinking about it.”

“I think it’s fun. You know how much I love Disney movies. And it’s like this tiny little fun thing that only really I can see, unless someone is specifically looking at my watch.”

“So, breakfast, kiddo? Your old man’s hungry.”

“Right. I looked up places in the area and found a coffee shop with good reviews and real breakfast options.”

“Lead the way.”

Kurt linked arms with Carole and they walked to the small shop. He opened the door and let her walk in.

“Ooh. It smells delicious in here,” she said.

“It does. It smells like cinnamon rolls. We should get one and split it, like dessert after breakfast.”

They got in line and ordered their food. Kurt took the number and they found an empty booth and sat down to wait.

“Now that you don’t have an audience around, I want to know how you’re doing,” Burt said.

“I’m a lot better than I was in the fall when we were in DC. I’m in a good place now. I’ve told you that seeing the counselor has helped a lot.”
“Yeah, I know, but over the phone it’s easy to get away with not telling me the whole truth and you already admitted last fall that you spent years perfecting the art of telling me half-truths.”

Kurt took a deep breath and let it out. “I know. I did. But I’m not telling you half the truth now. The truth is that I’m better. A lot better.”

“And you’re not seeing Blaine?”

“No. I’ve made it 7 months without even considering going back to Blaine. That’s just not a possibility anymore. Even if he completely changed, I wouldn’t go back to him. I’ve changed and I’m never going to be that guy that met his requirements back then.”

“Good, good. I’m just checking.”

“We talk fairly frequently, Dad. What’s causing you to feel the need to check?”

“Just curious. Blaine never unfriended, is that the word? Never unfriended Carole on Facebook. He just posts a lot of …”

Carole finished his statement, “Ambiguous stuff that implies things.”

“What kinds of ‘things’?”

“Like the two of you spending time together. He’s never changed his Facebook status. He never changed it to married, but when the two of you got back together, he changed it to ‘In a relationship with Kurt Hummel’. He’s left it like that all this time. He did change all of his settings to private though, so only his friends can see his page.”

“I see. When I looked at his page back at Christmas, I didn’t bother to even look at the part of the page that has the relationship status. But I am not seeing him. Not in any capacity. We are nothing to each other. He will never be anything to me again.”

“Alright. I believe you. I wish there was some way to make him stop posting stuff that makes it seem like you’re still together.”

“I don’t see how. When I broke up with him after he cheated on me, he continued to talk as if us getting back together was inevitable. And with my distinct lack of self-esteem, my fear about your health, and my inexperience in understanding how real friendships worked, I fell back into his arms with a lot of pushes by my so-called friends. To them and him, it was always a matter of when, not if, I would go back to him.”

“And now, that’s not true?”

“Oh, for him it seems that it is true, based on what you just said. My so-called friends sincerely believed that I was incredibly lucky to find someone as amazing as Blaine. I don’t really feel like rehashing all of this, but I will give you one really good example in hopes that this will be the last time we need to discuss this.”

He was interrupted by the server putting their tray down on the table.

“Thank you,” all three of them said.

The server nodded, took the number stand, and walked away.

“Okay. I don’t remember the whole thing verbatim because I was being verbally trashed. Last fall,
I did something that aggravated Santana. She stopped me in the hallway and started in on me. She insulted my looks, my voice, my teeth, my interest in working with old people, my dancing, and called me more feminine than Quinn. She had always called me feminine ‘nicknames’ – Lady Hummel, Twinkerbelle, Prancy Smurf, and others.” He lowered his voice as much as he could to keep anyone from overhearing him. “Part of it I do remember exactly. She said, ‘Maybe Blaine woke up one day and said, ‘You know what? I don’t want to marry a sexless, self-centered baton twirler.’ And after a few more insults, she called me ‘utterly intolerable.’”

Kurt stopped talking, but put his hand up to indicate that he wasn’t finished. He took a couple of bites of his food and a few sips of his coffee and attempted to put himself together.

“The thing is that I broke it off, not Blaine. So, there was the first part. In Santana’s mind, there was no scenario in which I would be the one to leave Blaine. He was the desirable one. I’m not going to explain the rest of the first part. Before she flounced off, she called me ‘utterly intolerable’. That is really how most of the people I thought were my friends treated me. It wasn’t really until last night that I realized that the people in my life now don’t see me that way. I have literally lived my whole life until yesterday believing that. When she said those things to me, I didn’t like it of course, but most of it wasn’t anything I hadn’t heard before. Some of them she phrased differently than their usual forms, but they had the same meaning. I didn’t even walk away. I just stood there and let her say those things to me. They were all things I knew to be true, I just thought that we had move past the point of her yelling them at me. Rachel stood there the whole time Santana was saying these things and did not speak up. She didn’t even say anything afterwards.”

“I don’t understand, honey. You actually think you’re intolerable?”

“Yes. And I don’t want you to contradict that. You wanted to know how I’m doing. I’m getting better. Last night was a big step in realizing that I’m NOT as intolerable as I have believed all these years. I guess I just need the two of you to know that I am better. I am not going back to him. He is not this amazing person and I am not an intolerable person who is lucky to have such a great guy willing to put up with me. In the future, whenever I am ready to date again, I will find someone who likes me for who I am, not what I can do for him. I’ve learned the difference and I’m willing to wait for the right guy. I have real friends, even though two out of the three aren’t going to be here anymore. I have a lot of friendly acquaintances. You saw that last night. And I still have Sebastian. Sam will still be here on the weekends for the summer and even in the fall if he doesn’t find a job. He’s still working 12 hours one weekend 24 hours the next weekend. And I found Elliott again, so we’ll see where that goes.”

Burt said, “Goes? Meaning you like him?”

“Meaning that he and I were friends, but not close friends when he disappeared a year and a half ago and most of what we did together revolved around the band. So, seeing how it goes means finding out whether we have enough in common or are similar enough to become good friends without the band as the thing that draws us together. I’m not actively looking for someone to date.”

“When is Adam leaving?” Carole asked.

“Sunday morning. I’m really going to miss him. He’s really special to me. He will always have this really special place in my heart.”

“It’s hard to have good friends move away.” Carole said.

Kurt nodded and went back to eating.
Burt said, “The food here is good.”

“It is. Is there anywhere the two of you would like to go while you’re here?”

“I’d really like to see where you go to school,” Carole said.

“Alright. When we finish, that’s where we’ll head.” He cut the cinnamon roll into three sections and took one of the sections and bit into it. “That’s really good.”

Burt and Carole picked the other two sections and polished them off before they headed out.

After showing them around the school, Kurt lead them back outside. They walked down the sidewalk towards the subway.

Carole said, “Sebastian seemed to be in his element in there dancing with…?”

“Miss July. He does really like it. He likes what he’s studying at Columbia, but he missed performing. Now he gets to do what he loves and get paid to do it and still study what he wants to.”

“Good for him,” Burt said.

“I liked the round room, I think you called it, the best. The sound must be amazing in there,” Carole said.

“It is really amazing to sing in there.”

“I got to hear him once. He was great.”

“How about we go sit in Central Park? We can talk for a while still and I can make sure you get to your hotel before I have to go to work.”

“Sure, honey.”

When they came up from the subway, they walked down the sidewalk a ways before they crossed the street.

“This place is like the size of a small town,” Carole said looking around.

“It is huge. But it’s nice to have this empty space, even though it’s not really empty. It feels open and more less confined.”

They found a place to sit.

“Tell me the truth, Kurt. Are you doing okay financially? I know you don’t want to ask us for money, but I want to know that you’re not skipping meals and skimping like you did when you were living here before.”

“I’m buying food. The only other money I’ve spent was for some new dance shoes I had to have for class, and some of the places we’ve been going to every other weekend cost to get in. But I pack my lunch for school days, eat at home for breakfast and dinner, and I even pack food for when we go out on our sightseeing trips. I do all of my shopping at Costco once a week. The three of us split the cost of what we get for dinners and we buy our own breakfast and lunch foods. Or sometimes we’ll split the cost of bulk purchase like a large pack of cheese or something.”
“That’s good.”

“You want the whole truth, so I’ll be completely honest. I have a few hundred dollars in savings. Dropping out of the internship last fall cost me a lot of money. Actually, leaving New York and going back to Ohio cost me a lot of money. The abbreviated version is that our tuition covers 18 credits hours a semester. If you take more, you pay an additional fee per credit hour. You can only change courses at no cost during the first two weeks of class. So, when I withdrew from the course midterm, I got no refund. I had to pay for the additional four credit hours. When I moved out of the dorm, I only got 75% refund on what I had paid for the room. I had opted not to take a meal plan, so there was no loss on that. I put the dorm fee refund toward the credit hour costs, but that only covered less than half of the cost. I put the rest on my emergency credit card because I only had a few hours to make all of those changes. I couldn’t take out an additional loan to do it. It was the credit card or nothing. So, between that and a couple of things, like an unexpected plumber last summer, I owed quite a bit on my card. I bought my books for the spring semester with my paychecks after I moved here. I divided what I owed on my card out and I’ve paid $900 a month, which is as much as I was paying for the half the rent on the loft. So, when I get paid tomorrow, I’m making the final payment and the credit card will be paid off.”

“Well, that’s good that you’ve been able to pay it off, but all this time I thought you had been able to save up, like Sam’s been doing.”

“I wish. Oh, and I did spend about $200 on the spring break road trip we took, but that was well worth the money. I needed a break and it was beautiful. I saw the ocean and mountains for the first time.”

“The photos you sent were really gorgeous,” Carole said.

Kurt nodded, but went back to answering Burt. “So, if I save up that $900 for the next three months, I’ll have a about $3000 in my savings. I’ll need to buy books. I have to work fewer hours next school year because I have to be in the fall play and the spring musical. So, that’s my next task – figuring out a way to make the most money in the fewest hours. If Sam finds a job in Purchase, I will probably see if I can get his job at the coffee shop since it is set weekend hours, leaving my weekdays open for rehearsals.”

Carole said, “So you’ll quit Vogue?”

“I haven’t figured out a way to stay. I need all-day availability for classes and rehearsals. I’ll fit studying in between those.”

“Just send us your tuition bill when you get it this summer. I was serious about us paying that this year, honey.”

“I know you were, but I can’t accept. I’m not refusing, but I don’t know how to say yes. You should do something you want to do with that money.”

“I am or at least I’m trying to.” She raised her eyebrows and pursed her lips in the way moms do.

Kurt sighed. “I’ll think about it.”

“Let’s go walk around for a while,” she said. “I want to see some other parts of the park. I’d actually like to see where you work, but that’s just because I’m nosy.”

“Let me text Isabelle and see if she’s okay with it.”
They dropped Burt off at a coffee shop just down the street and Kurt took Carole up to his office. He briefly showed her what he did, and then he took her on a tour of the office. He showed her where Sam had worked in the art department. He took her to the hair and make up area. He showed her where they did photo shoots. And after he had taken her all around, their last stop was the vault.

“Oh, wow. This is beautiful,” she pointed to a ball gown. “And that is gorgeous.” She looked around at all the clothes and walked along the wall of shoes before she started looking through the cases at the accessories. “There are some really beautiful things in here.”

“It’s a lot of fun to see what comes in for the photo shoots.”

“You’re fortunate to be just the right size to fit in most of the guys’ stuff.”

“I know. I won’t lie – it’s fun.”

“So, this is where the bag you’re carrying now came from?”

“Yes. She gave me a larger one for Adam that was dark brown leather like the jacket and boots she had let him take.”

“I feel like Cinderella in here. Dressed in rags while other people wear these amazing outfits.”

“Well, not even super rich people wear the fanciest of these clothes on a daily basis, they just wear them for special events. We do have some more regular looking clothes in here sometimes. Jeans, button-ups, less fancy suits. But right now, they’re photographing some stuff for Christmas and the New York Fashion Week editions. A lot of the stuff you see in here won’t be on the racks for 6 months. But we have stuff still in here from last winter and spring, like the bags. They were from the spring photo sessions for the fall layout. If you wear size 8 or 9 shoes, there’s probably still some nice boots, and you might like one of the Frye purses. Come look.”

Carole followed him over to where the bags where hanging. There was a wide variety from the functional, sturdy Frye bags to tiny delicate embroidered and bejeweled bags that would hold a phone, a small compact, and a tube of lipstick. She looked through all of them.

He showed her the boots next. “Ooh. The Frye boots with the harness straps are still here. Do you like these?”

“Those would look nice with some of my dresses or skirts.”

“Try them on. They’re a nice neutral between gray and tan. Technically, they’re in the brown family, but they have a bit of gray to them.”

She took her shoes off and tried them on. “I haven’t worn boots like these in years.”

“Go look in the mirror and see what you think.” Kurt walked over to the bags again and looked through them. He picked one up. “We still have the crossbody purse that was worn with the boots in the shoot.” He took it over to her. “It’s not as large as mine, but I think your Kindle and your other stuff would fit in it. And with it being a neutral color, you wouldn’t have to change it all the time.” He put it over her head and then adjusted the strap length a little longer. “What do you think?”

“The boots are actually more comfortable than I had expected. I do like the purse. I’m going to walk around a little bit and see about the boots.”

“That’s fine.” Kurt went and looked through the scarves and found one that would look good with
the denim dress she was wearing. He caught up with her. “Hold still for a second.” He reached around and tied the scarf. “There. What do you think about the boots? Go look in the mirror again and see.”

She walked back and turned and looked. “I do like them. What do you think?”

“I think they look good on you. Do you want a second opinion?” Kurt messaged Isabelle. “Why don’t you sit down and see if you think the bag would be useful?”

She took it over to where she had put her purse down and opened it up. “It has a lot of pockets.”

“I like mine a lot. I like having a place to slip things in so I don’t have to dig for them.”

She pulled her Kindle out and put it in to see if it would actually fit. “It does fit. The divided space is the perfect size for it. I do like it.”

“So, let me see,” Isabelle chirped as she came in.

Carole stood up and modeled for Isabelle.

“The whole ensemble looks great! The Frye line has this sort of retro almost cowboy feel to it while still pulling off urban chic. The boots and bag really go well with denim. And I like the scarf as an accent. Good choice.”

Carole beamed. “You really do think it looks good?”

“I do. And you are more than welcome to have all three items. They’re not going to be reused and we’re long past shooting for the fall anyway. We’re doing Christmas, New Year’s, and Fashion Week now. Those items you’re wearing are currently available in stores, so I’m free to let them leave.”

“Thank you. As long as you’re sure.”

“I’m positive. They’re yours. And I’m certain that they look quite lovely on you.” Isabelle smiled genuinely. “I’m glad to have gotten to meet you Mrs. Hummel. You have a lovely son, who is an excellent assistant.”

Carole smiled. “Thanks for letting me visit. I’ve always wondered what Kurt did here and what went on in a place like this.”

“Well, lots of clothing changes and people who can’t make up their minds arguing with each other causing the people in the clothes to change them again is what happens frequently,” Isabelle laughed. “It’s silly and it’s fun. I like it.”

“Well, thank you again. I’m sure you’re busy.”

She nodded and smiled. “I’ll see you in an hour, Kurt.” She left.

“Okay, so do you want to switch your stuff to the new bag and wear the boots?”

“I think I will. If I need to change them, I can switch back at the coffee shop.”

Kurt grabbed a handled paper sack and put Carole’s shoes in. He waited for her to switch the rest of the items from her purse to the new bag. She put the purse in the sack with her shoes.

“Ready to go meet back up with Dad?”
“Yes, but you have to take at least one picture of me over there in front of the fancy mirror so I can show off about getting to come here.”

He had already taken some that she hadn’t noticed, but he smiled and said, “Of course. Step up there and give me your phone.” He took several pictures of her, some serious and some silly. She stood by one of the cases with expensive accessories in it and with the racks of ball gowns behind her. “Ready?”

“I am. Thank you, honey. This was really fun. I miss you. Let’s head back to the coffee shop.”

Kurt carried the sack and he took one more picture of her in front of the Vogue reception desk on their way to the elevator. They walked back to the coffee shop.

“That was pretty quick,” Burt said. “Ooh. I like the boots. Very nice.”

Kurt was standing behind her and he pointed to his neck.

“I like the scarf. It’s really pretty. It looks good on you.”

She pulled the bag around.

“You got a bag kind of like the one Kurt has, but more what’s the word, not girly, but you know what I mean.”

“Mine’s a purse. His is a man’s mini messenger bag.”

“Right. I like the new purse. It matches the boots.”

She leaned over and kissed him. “Thank you. We had fun. Let’s get Kurt a sandwich here so he can eat quickly. He has to be at work at 2:00.”

“Sure. Come get in line with me, kiddo. Carole can keep our table while we’re in line.”

Kurt followed Burt and got in line and started to read through the menu board.

“Thanks for taking her with you. She misses you, but she feels guilty. I think you’ll have to be the one to bridge the gap now that she’s doing better.”

“Okay. I miss her too.”

“She knows. That’s why she feels so bad. You really took to her and accepted her and let her into your life and then with everything that happened, she just fell apart. She feels like if she gets close to you again, she’ll just end up relapsing, like she did at Christmas, and letting you down again.”

“I can understand that, but I’m not a child and I know that grief and depression affect people differently. Finn and I never managed to get all that close, but losing a child has to just be so hard.” He stepped forward. “I’ll have the turkey on a croissant with swiss, tomatoes, lettuce, and sliced red onions, please. And an bottle of cranberry juice.”

Burt ordered sandwiches for Carole and himself as well. He paid and they scooted down to wait for their order. Kurt grabbed the tray and carried it to the table.

“These look good.” Carole pulled the sandwiches off the tray.

Burt grabbed the drinks and Kurt tipped the tray up on its side and propped it against the wall behind the napkin dispenser. They ate and didn’t talk a lot since Kurt was short on time. When
they finished, Kurt collected everything, dumped the trash, and put the tray away. They stepped outside.

“You’re not that far from your hotel, but I’d suggest a taxi. I’ll get one for you. I don’t want you going back through the subway on your own. It’s too easy to get mixed up and I know you need to leave soon to avoid driving in the dark.” He hugged both of them. “Thank you for coming. I’ve really enjoyed you being here.” He handed Carole the sack.

“We’ll see what we can work out about seeing each other more often,” Burt said.

Kurt nodded. He walked to the edge of the street and flagged down a taxi for them. He gave the driver the name of the hotel. He waved as they drove off.

Kurt stopped in Isabelle’s office on the way to his own. “Thank you. I know that what she was wearing is nowhere near fashionable these days, but she loves denim.”

“It suits her. It really does. And the boots looked good with it. They weren’t too cowboyish and they weren’t so dressy that they looked over-the-top. And that purse is the same. It’s functional, but still has a slight feminine flair to it. And the scarf was a good addition to bring some liveliness and color to the otherwise monochrome dress.”

“Well, you made her feel like a million bucks. I took pictures that she’s going to show off to probably her sister and cousins.”

Isabelle smiled. “She deserved the fun. I can’t do a lot, but I can sometimes put a smile on people’s faces.”

Kurt nodded. “At some point, I need to talk to you about next fall.”

Her face dropped. “You’re going to quit.”

“I don’t know what else to do, Isabelle. Madame Tibideaux made it abundantly clear that she expects me to get a role in the fall play and the spring musical. Plus, what will have been the point of spending four years studying musical theatre if I don’t get any real experience doing it? Technically, I should have been in both this year and one of them last year. I have no experience to list on audition forms. I have to do this. I will have rehearsals and I can’t be here in the late afternoon and early evening and make it to those rehearsals.”

“I’m glad you’re telling me now. That gives me nearly three months to figure it out.”

“How about two months to figure it out because if you can’t, I need a month to find a new job.”

“Fine, two months, but I really don’t want you to look for a new job.”

He smiled and walked to his office to get started.

He exited the building when he got off to find both Sebastian and Adam waiting for him.

“Why are two of my favorite people in the world waiting for me after work?” Kurt hugged Sebastian and then hugged Adam.

Adam said, “Well, Sebastian was telling me about you taking him to a cheese shop, and I love
cheese, so we’re going to the cheese shop.”

“Alright.”

“Did you have a nice morning with your parents?” Adam asked.

“I did. Isabelle let me bring Carole in to look around. She had a really good time. She’s not really into fashion, but she was very curious about how a magazine and website are run. She got a trip into the vault too. I’ll show you a picture when we get on the subway. We had sandwiches here,” Kurt pointed it out as they walked past the shop. “It was a bit pricey, but they were really good.”

“Better than pricey and mediocre,” Adam teased.

“Definitely. What have you been up to today?”

“That’s top secret.”

“More surprises?”

“Mmm hmm.”

They couldn’t talk much as they headed down into the subway. They stood as close to Kurt as they could so they’d make it into the same car. They pushed their way through the crowd and made it inside. There was only room for two of them to sit down. Adam sat, as did Sebastian, who pulled Kurt down to sit on their laps.

“Show us the pictures of Carole,” Adam said.

Kurt took his phone out and showed them a few.

“She looks happy,” Sebastian said. “I took pictures at your party last night. Some of them are pretty good. I did get a nice one of the three of you.”

“Send it to me and I’ll send it to them. I don’t think there are any pictures of the three of us since, well, maybe never. They’d like to have it, I’m sure.”

“I’ll send it to you.”

“I want to make sure to get a picture of all four of us at Coney Island on Saturday,” Kurt said. “I’m excited. I’ve only been to a theme park once and it was three years ago.” When the car stopped, Kurt got up to move towards the doors and the other two followed. When the doors opened, they pushed their way out and then through the crowd to get up the stairs.

They tried to stay together, but ended up more like a line making their way down the crowded sidewalk. Once they reached their destination, Kurt opened the door and the other two went inside.

“It’s lovely.” Adam surveyed the large cases of cheese with a gleam in his eyes. “Look at all of the lovely cheese. How did I not know about this place?”

“I only found it last week because I was specifically looking for a place that sold specialty cheeses to take Sebastian to.”

They took their time and looked through the selections. They all three made purchases and ate them on their way back to the subway. Before they got there, Adam stopped.

“Let’s find the closest used book store. I want to buy a book.”
Kurt pulled his phone out and found one not too far away. He showed it to Adam.

“Hmm. I’m not sure that’s what I’m looking for.” He put the number in his phone and called. He stepped away from the commotion and stood close the building to try to hear. He came back a couple of minutes later. “Not that one. Let’s look again.”

After a couple of tries, they found a place. They got on the subway and got off again a few stops later. They walked a couple of blocks and found it.

“What are you looking for?” Kurt asked.

“You’ll see.” Adam went back to the young adult section and found what he was looking for.

“You want to read the same book I am?” Sebastian asked.

“Well, the other day, I may have borrowed it for a bit when we went to the park and I’d like to finish reading it on the horribly long flight back to London. I’ve picked up the next book in the series as well. I don’t sleep on planes.”

“Is that it then?” Kurt asked.

“Yes, love. Let me go pay for these.”

Adam insisted on buying Indian food for dinner on the way back to the apartment since their excursions had kept them out so late. They stopped by a Redbox and Adam picked out a movie that he kept secret.

Once they finished eating, Adam put the DVD in. He turned off the lights and started it.

“Into the Woods? I wanted to see this and never made it to the movie theater during winter break. I didn’t even think to see if it was out on DVD yet,” Kurt said. “The reviews I saw were good. I’m excited. Press play.”

The next morning, Adam had Kurt out and about early.

“Where are we going?” Kurt asked.

Adam answered, “It’s a surprise.”

Kurt just shook his head and smiled. “Fine, surprise me then.”

“I think I will.” He grabbed Kurt’s hand and led him through the crowded sidewalk.

Adam stopped and opened a door that had no markings. They walked up the flight of stairs and Adam knocked on one of the doors. Alex, a fellow NYADA student, opened the door. Kurt followed Adam in. Once they got a few feet into the area, Kurt realized that it was a small recording studio. He looked around perplexed.

“What are we doing here?”

“Making a CD.”

“A CD?”
“Yes. We’ll just need to wait for a few more people to get here, but here’s the song list and the lyrics, but I doubt you’ll need those.” He handed Kurt a binder.

He opened it up. “Who’s singing?”

“You and me and a few other people.”

“Some of these songs seem to be from the ‘Greatest Hits of Songs Publicly Performed by Kurt Hummel’ list.”

Adam laughed. “True, very true.”

“A few of which I have no idea how you know about.”

“Ah, well you gave me that information by telling me that Sam had video files of you singing.”

“I see.”

“I got to see them on Wednesday.”

Just then there was knocking on the door. Alex opened the door and let everyone else in – Sam, Sebastian, Callie, and some instrumentalists that played with the Apples.

“Sam and Sebastian?”

“Miss July likes me. What can I say?” Adam said. “I personally asked her to give Sebastian the morning off.”

“And Sam?”

“I stayed late yesterday and did half of today’s work and I’ll stay late Monday to do the other half.”

Kurt’s smile lit up his face. He hugged Sam. “Thank you.” He turned back to Adam. “So, explain this to me.”

“Well, I decided that I wanted to make a CD with some of my favorite people before I leave. So, here we are. We can warm up a bit while the musicians get used to the instruments here and warm up.”

A half-hour later, they started to run through the songs.

“Okay, so I want us to do our best while having fun with this. We’ll sing each song all the way through twice. Whichever one comes out better will go on the CD. I just want a recording of us singing today. If you go off pitch or forget a word, just keep going. This is just for us.”

Two and a half hours later they had 15 songs recorded. They all went out to lunch together and afterwards went their separate ways. Adam headed back to the studio with Alex to choose the final version of the songs. Sam went to Vogue with Kurt for a little bit before heading back to the apartment. Sebastian went to class, and then back to the apartment. When Adam had the CD finished and the copies made, he headed back as well.

The three of them had dinner ready when Kurt got home. He walked in the door and the table was set and the food was on the table. They had made the meal that Sam had planned – pulled pork, string beans, and Cajun-style rice.
“Oh, wow. It looks great.”

He washed his hands and sat down with them and ate. When they finished, he collected the plates and loaded the dishwasher since they had already done the pots and pans before he got home.

“So, Whist, was it?” Kurt asked.

“Exactly.”

“I’ll grab the cards when I change. I’ll be right back.”

Around 8:00, they got ready for bed and went back out to the living room after they were in their pajamas. Kurt turned the lights off and started their last *Doctor Who* marathon.

After four episodes, Sam grabbed the bedding from their bedroom and took it out to the living room. He helped Adam make the sofa up, and then went to bed.

Kurt said, “Thanks for coming back this morning. That was the second big surprise from you this week.”

“I talked to my instructors about it and they were okay with it as long as I do the work. It’s not every day a good friend asks you to come sing on a CD before he leaves the country.”

“Yeah.” Kurt sighed. “We really just have one day left with him. He’s leaving early Sunday morning.”

“C’mere. I missed my snuggles.”

Kurt laughed at him and scooted over. “I let Adam sleep in the bed because I figured he’d sleep better than on the sofa, but the first night I forgot to warn him of my sleep snuggle issue. I was mortified when I woke up snuggling him.”

“I’m sure he didn’t mind.”

“He didn’t, but I was super embarrassed. I’ll have to get Bruce out of the space bag he’s in and get him washed and fluffed up for Sunday night.”

Kurt had been planning to make pancakes and sausages for breakfast, but when they were talking while they were doing yoga, Adam and then Sebastian confessed to having never tried biscuits and gravy in the entirety of the time they had been in the States, Kurt decided to rectify the situation.

He and Sam made biscuits, and while they were in the oven Kurt cooked the sausage links and slit two of them open and browned them in a skillet to use for the gravy. Sebastian made coffee and Adam poured small glasses of juice for everyone. Sam and Kurt plated the food and everyone took their plates and sat down together.

“Oh my, this is actually quite good,” Adam said. “It never sounded appealing, probably because no matter how many times I tell myself that biscuits are not cookies, the image of shortbread cookies with beef gravy on them pops into my head.”

Kurt and Sam laughed. Sam said, “That’s disgusting. No wonder you never had the nerve to order it in a restaurant. Yuck.”
Sebastian said, “I just never considered ordering it. I’d never seen anyone eat it, but it’s really good.”

“I’m glad you both like it,” Kurt said.

“So, Coney Island?” Sam said. “I’m so excited. I’ve been looking forward to this.”

“I think we all have,” Adam said.

After they finished eating, they got ready for the day and headed out at 9:00 to make sure they were there by the time it opened.

“Sebastian said, “I just never considered ordering it. I’d never seen anyone eat it, but it’s really good.”

“I’m glad you both like it,” Kurt said.

“So, Coney Island?” Sam said. “I’m so excited. I’ve been looking forward to this.”

“I think we all have,” Adam said.

The beach here and the view is more like the view at Lake Erie rather than feeling like the ocean,” Kurt said. “It’s still pretty though.”

“I never made it up to Lake Erie when I lived in Ohio. I really didn’t utilize my time there well at all. I’m sure there were plenty of nice things to see and do. But I blew my chances by being an idiot, which cost me my car.”

“Well, I was too scared to do any of them. I never did much of anything. I went to Lake Erie with my dad back when I was in junior high. I viewed Lima as a microcosm of the whole of Ohio and assumed that every place was as homophobic as Lima. I didn’t venture out places alone because I figured that I was likely to end up in a dumpster or worse.”

“Well, the two of you know that I never had the money to do any of the things that might have been cool, except that I did go out with you guys for senior skip day. That was fun.”

“So we all three lived there for a significant period of time and didn’t do much of anything,” Kurt just shook his head. “What a group. At least Adam will go back home and not have to tell everyone that he did nothing of interest while he was here.”

“That’s true. I’ve had loads of fun exploring New York City with the three of you all semester. My mum probably has photos of the four of us all over her fridge. She’s big on printing photos out rather than just keeping them on a CD or on her computer.”

“Will you get to see her and the rest of your family soon?”

“My mum and dad and my sister are coming to see the show on Saturday. I’m looking forward to seeing them. Rumor is that my sister has a boyfriend. Whether my mum and dad know is yet to be seen.”

“Fifteen and a boyfriend? Sounds like a recipe for heartbreak,” Sebastian said. “But hopefully not. I feel like such an old geezer saying things like that. I’m not even 22 yet, but 15 just seems so young now.”

“Let’s go get in line to get in when the park opens,” Kurt said, effectively changing the subject.

They were close to the front of the line and they headed straight to the Cyclone as soon as they were in the park, hoping to have the shortest wait that way. They spent several hours riding and re-riding the rides. Around 3:00, they decided they were ready to take a break and eat lunch. They opted for Nathan’s mostly because it was the touristy thing to do.

While they were eating, Adam looked something up on his phone. “I thought we’d stay all day, but
it’s pretty hot and quite crowded. I know that Kurt and I just went to the Aquarium a few days ago, but it was so nice there. It’s open until 9 this evening. I’d love to go back and I know it’s not in anyone’s budget to go to a second ticketed place today, but the tickets for all of us would be less than two nights in a barely reputable hotel would have been, and I’ve stayed at your place for 7 nights, counting tonight.”

He didn’t get any response.

“Please?”

Kurt smiled and nodded. He didn’t want Adam to pay for his ticket, but he didn’t want Adam to not get to do what he wanted on his last day in New York. The others gave in after Kurt had acquiesced.

“Excellent. Let’s head over there.”

“Another trip here and watching the animals get fed really makes me question my career choice,” Kurt said. “I want to get paid to feed cute animals all day.”

“We might not be as cute as the otters and sea lions, but we let you feed us all the time,” Sebastian said, batting his eyelashes teasing Kurt. “We could always learn to make those cute sea lions noises while we eat.”

Kurt sighed and rolled his eyes. “Well, it seems that’s as close as I’m going to get doesn’t it. And you three hug me occasionally. The otters and sea lions would never do that.”

“Hugging?” Sam pulled him into a hug. “I’m an expert at hugging.”

Kurt tried to step back. “What are you doing?” Kurt looked completely embarrassed.

“Hugging you of course. I thought you just said you liked us hugging you.”

“Well, I do, but everyone’s going to think you’re gay.”

“I’ve told you a million times by now that I don’t care. Remember us dancing in gay clubs? I’m sure everyone who saw us thought I was gay. I’m not bothered by that.”

“You’re the most unusual straight guy, ever.” Kurt hugged him back.

“I think I’m completely normal and the rest of the ‘usual’ straight guys are missing out on a lot of fun by acting like other guys have cooties. It’s stupid. We’ve snuggled hundreds of times, maybe a thousand by now and I’ve not turned gay. What more proof do those idiots want? I’ve been hanging out with three gay men for 6 months, and I’m still straight.”

“I know. It’s so sad,” Kurt said.

Sam looked downcast. “I mean, I’ve done everything to catch it from you to no avail.” He shook his head dejectedly. “It’s just so disappointing. I’ve cooked with you, watch all those sappy British chick flicks and TV shows, snuggled you for HOURS, totaling at least a week by now I’m sure. I even got a job at a fashion magazine, and I dress much better now. All that work and I’m still straight.”

“You are such a goof,” Kurt said.
Sam laughed. “But isn’t that what a lot of the stupid straight people told you? ‘You don’t do enough guy things. Play a sport. Dress like a normal guy.’ It’s all just ridiculous. I’m going to hug whoever I want to, well of course, only if they want hugged, but you know what I mean. I’ll dance with whoever I damn well please. I’ll sleep in the same bed with whoever I want to. None of it has anything to do with my sexual preferences and anyone who thinks it does probably isn’t on my list of people to befriend anyway.” Sam put his arm back around Kurt’s waist.

Kurt leaned in and put his head on Sam’s shoulder. “My Sam is totally awesome.”

Adam said, “Your Sam? I thought he was OUR Sam? Who gave you the right to claim him for yourself?”

Sam reached out and put his other arm around Adam’s waist. “There. All better?”

“Much,” Adam teased.

“What about me?” Sebastian asked.

“We’ll have to take turns,” Kurt said. “Come closer. It can be your turn to walk next to me for now.” Kurt reached out for Sebastian’s hand. Once he pulled him close enough, he wrapped his arm around Sebastian’s waist. “There.”

“We look ridiculous now,” Sam said.

Kurt said, “We look like we’re about to break out into a dance from A Chorus Line.”

Sam switched up and put his hands on Adam’s waist and started a conga line. “Change up. Single file. Or we won’t fit through the door to get inside to see the sharks.”

Adam started laughing so hard that he stopped moving. “A conga?”

“Sure, why not?” Sam said.

“You’re crazy,” Adam said.

“Never said I wasn’t.” He let go of Adam and grabbed the door and held it open for the other three. “But crazy and happy with my three best friends beats how I was a year ago by a million miles.”

“Amen!” Kurt said.

“Let’s go look at the sharks before one of you three breaks out in song,” Sebastian teased. “Knowing the three of you, I’m sure that at least one of you actually KNOWS a shark song.”

Kurt started humming “Under the Sea” and when he got to the chorus, he stepped closer to Sebastian and began to sing quietly.

Darling it’s better
Down where it’s wetter
Take it from me
Up on the shore the work all day
Out in the sun they slave way

And then went back to humming. Sebastian was laughing louder than Kurt was humming.
When they got back to the apartment, it was really late, but they decided to go through with their plan to make individual pizzas like they did the first weekend that Adam had stayed over.

Adam and Kurt went and showered while Sebastian and Sam got everything out and preheated the oven. Once Adam and Kurt were back, the four of them made the pizzas. Sam and Sebastian went to shower while the pizzas baked.

Kurt stepped closer to Adam, who was leaning against the counter. Adam reached out to him and Kurt nearly fell into his arms. “I’m sorry. I want everything to be happy and fun and I did have a great time today, but now it’s our last dinner and I’m just sad. I’m going to miss you so much.”

“I’m going to miss you too, love. So much. But I’m glad you came back into my life. I’ve had a great time over the last 6 months spending time with you and your crazy roommates, who have become my good friends as well.”

Kurt didn’t let go. He kept his arms wrapped around Adam’s torso and held him close. “Sam’s going to sleep with Sebastian tonight, that is if you can put up with one more night of me snuggling you in your sleep.”

Adam laughed. “I made a choice. I got in bed with you fully aware of the fact that bodily contact was a distinct possibility. Two bodies, one bed. It happens. And I would be more than glad to take my chances.”

The oven started to beep. Kurt stepped back, grabbed two potholders, opened the oven door, pulled the pizzas out, and placed them on top of the stove to cool. A couple of minutes later, Sebastian and Sam reappeared in their pajamas, ready to eat.

They plated their pizzas after cutting them into slices, and they took them into the living room to watch a final episode of *Doctor Who* together.

Kurt turned the light off and got in bed. He lay flat on his back, staring at the ceiling in the darkness. “I hope everything goes smoothly with your play after you get there.”

“I think it will. I’ve been in daily contact with the director. Rehearsals have been going well, so I think we’re set. I’ll make sure you get to see it somehow.”

“Thank you.”

“I have a nosy question.”

“I don’t think I have any secrets that you don’t already know.”

“Well, this isn’t actually a secret. It’s just personal.”

“Alright.”

“Do you sleep well if you’re the one snuggled?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Sam’s let me sleep on his shoulder before and wrapped his arm around me. But that’s still me snuggling him. Why? Do you want to snuggle me instead?”

“Would you mind?”

“We might need to change sides of the bed.”
“Alright.”

Kurt got up and Adam scooted over. Kurt lay back down where Adam had been.

“You’re sure?”

“I won’t know unless I try, right?”

“But you also have the freedom to say ‘no’ if you don’t want to do something.”

Kurt flashed back to the night in the Scandals parking lot and other nights when his “no” had been ignored. When he had been badgered into giving in, reminded how he needed to “be there”, told that it was wrong to say “no” after he had said “yes” to the engagement. He remembered how he feigned interest in order to stay on the giving end because of the pain involved otherwise. Silent tears streamed down his face as he scooted back a little trying to give Adam the hint to scoot closer.

“Kurt, love. You’re crying.”

“It’s not because of you. Well, it is, but not in the way you probably think.”

“Help me understand.”

“You can hold me. I trust you.”

Adam scooted forward and slid up behind Kurt, not pressing in too tightly, lying just close enough that he could put his hand on Kurt’s shoulder.

“It’s what you said about me being allowed to say ‘no’. Not the snuggling itself that made me cry. I’m fine – actually better than fine. Can I scoot back a bit more?”

“Sure, love.” Adam let his arm relax and slide over Kurt chest. “Still okay?”

“Yes.” He had managed to quell the tears and add it to the list of things he needed to still work through. He had an appointment Monday to see the therapist. He’d talk about it then and refocus on enjoying his last few hours with Adam.

“Good. You’re quite snuggle-able.”

Kurt chuckled. “I’m not sure that’s a word.”

“It is. I just used it. That makes a word.”

“Of course.”

They both relaxed. Adam’s rhythmic breathing lulled Kurt to sleep.

Kurt was up before dawn, making pancakes in the kitchen when Sam came out of Sebastian’s room.

“Did you sleep okay?”

“Yeah, it was fine. He doesn’t snore or thrash around or anything. But I didn’t get my snuggle.”
“Come here. I’ll give you a hug and some pancakes and ham.”

“Hugs and pancakes?” Adam asked. “Sounds like a great breakfast combination.”

Kurt laughed. He hugged Sam and gave him a plate of food. He took it and sat down at the table to eat.

Adam walked into the kitchen and leaned against the counter. “Anything I can do to help?”

“Nope. You’re tea is steeping and your pancakes are almost ready.” Kurt began plating them and put a slice of ham on his plate as well and handed it to him. He started another batch of pancakes. He put them in a bowl and sat them to the side. He made one last batch and plated them for himself. He grabbed his coffee and sat down with the other two.

Sam didn’t dawdle because he had to be at work on time, but he got Adam to get up and give him a hug before he left. “I hope your show goes great. We’re going to miss you.”

“Thanks, I’m going to miss you too.” Adam stepped back and let Sam go. “Good luck with your classes.”

“Thanks.” Sam opened the door, turned back and waved before he shut it.

Adam took a deep breath and sat back down to finish eating. “So yoga?”

“In a bit. I don’t usually eat such a heavy breakfast and then exercise, but how about in a half-hour?”

“Sure.” He finished up his food and put his plate in the dishwasher, returning and offering to take Kurt’s. He put everything in and closed it.

Kurt got up and put Sebastian’s pancakes in the fridge and started washing the pants and utensils.

“I’ll just go check to make sure that I haven’t left anything lying around the apartment.”

A few minutes later, Kurt had finished the dishes and went down to his room. He found Adam staring at his suitcase, which was full, but there were still items on the bed.

“I have a question for you. If I were to leave some of these items behind, could you keep them until I’ve figured out where I’m going to be after the end of August? I’ll send you the money to ship them to wherever I am. I’m just thinking that hauling all of this winter stuff and paying for the extra luggage fees just so that I can leave it packed up and haul it all somewhere else in two months isn’t the best idea. I’m sharing a flat with three other people and I don’t even know anything about the storage availability.”

“So, you just want to leave your second suitcase and some of this other stuff here?”

“Basically, yes.”

“Well, the underneath of the bed is empty. We could put the suitcase under there and half of Sebastian’s coat closet is empty. He might be willing to let you hang your winter coats and things in there. I can box everything up, and ship it to you whenever you’ve settled in somewhere. Obviously, you don’t need a winter coat and clothes in the summertime.”

“Thank you. I’ll repack this and put the extra suitcase under the bed.”

“I can help you fold if you want.”
“Sure.”

Adam began to remove all of the clothing from both of his suitcases and separated the items into separate areas. Kurt refolded all of the winter items, while Adam repacked all of the items he was taking with him. A little more than a half-hour later, they had managed to get the project finished.

“Thank you. This just makes more sense. If I end up staying in London, I’ll end up getting my own place or at least choosing who to room with and where. This will make traveling tomorrow easier too.”

Sebastian knocked on the open door. “Morning. It looks like you’re finishing up.”

“Would it be alright if I leave my winter coats and a few jackets in your closet? Kurt said that he would pack them up and mail them once I know where I’m going to be after August. It just seems like a lot to drag into tiny flat with four people for such a short period of time.”

“Yeah, no problem. It’s not like we’re going to be getting anything in and out of the coat closets any time soon. It’s going to be hot for the next three months.”

“Thanks.” Adam grabbed the winter items and took them to the living room. He came back just a few minutes later. “I’ll need some hangers.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it. Just leave them here on the bed. When Sebastian and I go to Costco later, I’ll buy some and hang your coats up when we get back.”

Sebastian ate his breakfast while Adam and Kurt did yoga.

“Thanks for making me breakfast.”

“You’re welcome.”

They continued through Kurt’s routine and put the mats away. Adam let Kurt get ready first, then went in the room and dressed and brought his suitcase and satchel out. He put his satchel on the table and double-checked that he didn’t have any forbidden items in it. Kurt and Sebastian were both ready. Once Adam finished searching his satchel, the three of them headed down to the parking garage. Kurt opened the cover on the truck and Adam put his suitcase in. Kurt got in to drive. Adam slid to the center, and Sebastian sat in the passenger seat.

The drive to La Guardia took less than an hour. Kurt pulled into the passenger drop-off area. He opened the back and grabbed Adam’s suitcase. He pulled it toward the door and let Adam and Sebastian say their goodbyes. Adam hugged Sebastian and Sebastian nodded and Adam stepped back and walked toward the airport door where Kurt was waiting for him. Kurt followed him inside. They stepped out of the way of the others entering and exiting the area.

Kurt wrapped his arms around Adam. “I’m going to miss you.” He squeezed him. “I’ll write real letters just like you asked me to, but I’ll email you more. And we can figure out when you can Skype. When you get back from the theater at night I should be getting home from work not long after that.”

“We’ll work something out, I promise. I’m not going to forget about you.”

Kurt nodded and held on tight. “I hope not.”
Adam gave him one last squeeze. “I have to get my luggage checked in.”

Kurt stepped back and nodded. “Alright. Let me know you’ve gotten there safely.”

“I will.” He grabbed the handle on his suitcase. He pulled it toward the check in counters. Once he got in the British Airways line, he waved at Kurt.

Kurt waved back and then headed back out to the truck. Sebastian had gotten into the driver’s seat. Kurt climbed in the passenger side and closed the door. Once he had his seat belt on, Sebastian pulled out into the traffic. He drove to Costco and parked. Neither one of them said a word on the drive.

Sebastian reached out and put his hand on Kurt’s shoulder. Kurt wiped his eyes. “There’s not much use in crying, is there? He’s gone. And I’m going to miss him like crazy. It was my own fault for going back… and losing him. I’m glad we’re friends now though. He’s just… he’s the only person who never wanted me to be someone besides who I am and who actually sought me out to befriend. The song the Apples sang at my birthday party – that’s what he lured me to the group with. He made me laugh when things were really rough. He never asked more than I could give. I know time is like a river. It keeps flowing and I can’t step back to a previous point, but if that possibility existed, I would have taken him home with me that week and I would have told my dad that Adam and I were dating. None of the rest of that nonsense would have ever happened.”

“You know that I don’t believe in fate, so I don’t believe that bad things or good things happen for a great cosmic purpose, but we both know that even when we’ve made the wrong choices, all we can do is move forward and try to do better. I’m glad I got the chance to meet him and become friends with him. It’s meant a lot to me. He knows about my past, but he never held it against me. I was honest with him. I didn’t want him to think that I was something that I wasn’t. I wasn’t a good friend to you back when we met. He encouraged me. He told me the important thing was that I had learned from my mistakes and stopped repeating them. He helped me see that there are people in the world worth being friends with besides you and Sam – that I can try again. I can be who am less fearfully. I know it doesn’t seem like I’m that afraid, but I am. I’m going to go from pretty much no money for the past nearly three and a half years to being completely responsible for everything once I’m given my trust fund. I don’t want to be one of those people who goes crazy like a celebrity or a lottery winner. I’m going to go against my father’s wishes next summer. I’m not going to go to law school. It’s stressful and scary, knowing that he’s going to disown me or pretend I don’t exist at all. Adam is a good listener and I can absolutely see what you saw in him. Or maybe still see. Either way, he’s been the same to me as he was to you. He accepted me for who I am now and how I used to be without condemning me or condoning my past behavior. I’m going to miss him too.”

Kurt nodded. “Next summer when you tell your father than you’re not going to follow in his footsteps and I’ll have to tell mine that I’m moving home to work in his shop which is exactly what I didn’t want to do and I was so determined to avoid. And if he has no openings, I’ll have to take whatever jobs I can get working more than full time at minimum wage to make my loan payments. He doesn’t know how much I’ve borrowed. Our fathers will not be pleased with us.”

“You can’t make it by working at Vogue?”

“No. Even if Isabelle somehow got me hired on full time, I’d just be able to make my loan
payment each month. I take that back. I would still be able to buy food and pay for my phone and
stuff. I just mean that I can’t make my loan payment each month and pay for housing in the City on
what I would make working there full time. It just hard knowing that Rachel’s gotten her second
big break on Broadway and she’s there with Jesse, who flunked out of UCLA and was nothing but
horrible to everyone except Rachel back in high school. Adam is so good and sweet and incredibly
talented, yet he auditioned for a ton of things and didn’t get cast in anything. It’s like being in New
York is no different than it was being in Ohio. Okay, this has to stop. End of pity party. We have
shopping to do. Let’s go get our food. We’ve been sitting here for ages.”

Sebastian took a deep breath and let it out. “I wish I knew something to say to make it better. But
someone important to us is gone from our lives and I don’t think there’s anything that’s going to
make us feel better today. So, you’re right. Let’s get our food and go home. We can throw
ourselves an epic pity party in the comfort of our own home instead of sitting in the heat in Sam’s
truck in the Costco parking lot.”

After Sebastian and Kurt finished putting the groceries away, Sebastian started to work on
browning the meat. Before joining Sebastian in the cooking, Kurt went down to his room to change
his clothes into something more casual since he had dressed up to send Adam off. He walked into
his room and found two stuffed otters on his bed. They looked a lot alike, but they were in slightly
different poses and they weren’t identical. There was a card laying next them on his pillow.

“I can’t give you real ones, but maybe these little cuties can keep you company. Love, Adam”

“Kurt?”

“Yeah, in here.”

Sebastian stopped at the door. “Those are cute.”

“Adam left them for me. There’s gift on Sam’s pillow too.”

Sebastian stepped out and went in his own room to find something on his pillow as well. He
unwrapped it to find a black, hand-pieced, soft leather journal cover with a notebook in it. He
opened it up and read the post-it note that he could see slightly sticking out the top.

“You have a story to tell. Just set yourself free from your own fears. Your wings have healed. You
can soar. Love, Adam”

He carried the leather journal back to Kurt’s room. “He left me a beautiful journal to write in.” He
showed it to Kurt.

“That was sweet. It’s really beautiful. It has a similar feel to your new bag and I like that the
notebook inside can be replaced.”

“It’s a really thoughtful gift.” He put the journal on his desk and went back to the kitchen to finish
what he had started.

Kurt put the otters on his nightstand and changed.

Sam came back about 6:15 to find Kurt and Sebastian on the sofa reading.
“Hey, Sam,” Kurt said. “Dinner will be ready in about 10 minutes. Adam left you something. It’s on the bed.”

Sam went down to their room and opened the package. Inside, he found a lovely paintbrush roll carrier with a couple of specialty paintbrushes in it. There was also a note, which said, “You are a gifted artist. Your work makes the world a more beautiful place. Love, Adam.” He rolled it back up. He took a photo of the note, and then put it in his wallet. He took the roll carrier out to the living room to show the other two. “He left me a roll carrier for my paintbrushes – a really nice one. It looks handmade. He put a few really nice specialty brushes in it.” Sam rolled it out on the sofa between them to show it off.

“That’s really nice,” Kurt said. “Very handy.” He picked it up and looked at it. “I think you’re right that it’s handmade. Very nice workmanship. The space fabric was probably the first clue that it was handmade,” Kurt teased. “It’s very you.”

“It is. Very personal and it’s perfect because I don’t have one.”

“He must have found or have known of some kind of gift shop that sells handmade items.”

“He left me a leather journal cover with a notebook in it.”

“Nice.”

“It is.”

“What did he leave you?” Sam asked Kurt.

Kurt went and got the two stuffed otters and brought them back.

“Oh, those are adorable.”

“They are.” Kurt went back to the bedroom and put them back. When he came back out the oven was beeping. He headed into the kitchen and pulled the pan of spinach lasagna out of the oven and put it on top of the stove on a trivet to cool. Do you need to do laundry before you go?”

“I’m actually good. There’s a washer and dryer in the apartment.” He walked down to the bedroom to put the paintbrush carrier in his backpack. He came back a couple of minutes later. “You know there’s another really small package on the bed. I didn’t notice it until I put my backpack up on the bed to put the carrier in. It was behind the throw pillow that I bumped with my backpack. I bet one of the otters was holding it originally and it slipped down.”

Kurt went down to see what it was. He opened the small box to find a pewter brooch that was a phoenix rising out of flames. Sam and Sebastian came down a couple of minutes later, both curious as to what else Adam had left.

“It’s a brooch or a large lapel pin.” He held it up for them to see. “It looks handmade like the other gifts. It’s really lovely.”

Sam and Sebastian went back to the kitchen. Kurt could hear them getting plates out. He pulled out a rolled note and read it. “Your life may have been a smoldering fire that burst into flames, but you’re rising from the ashes and your feathers are growing back even more lovely than ever. Before long, you’ll soar high above, more beautiful and free than you had ever imagined. Stay strong. Love, Adam.” Kurt began to cry. He put the note in the book he was reading to keep it from getting lost until he decided where to keep it. He put the brooch in the antique print block tray he had repurposed for his brooches back in high school. He wiped his eyes, went in the bathroom and
splashed cold water on his face before going back out to the dining room to sit down and have dinner.

After Sam left at 7:30 to go back to Purchase, Kurt pulled the space bag out that had Bruce in it. He unzipped the bag and put Bruce, along with his pajamas into the washer. While the load was going, Kurt looked through his storage totes for his dryer balls. He managed to find them and get the totes back into the closet by the time the washer stopped. He put his boyfriend pillow in the dryer with the dryer balls and turned it on.

Sebastian came out of his room a few minutes later. “The dryer sounds like it’s falling apart. What’s going on?” He opened the laundry closet door.

Kurt laughed as he came out of his room. “The dryer is fine. Bruce is in the dryer and after spending so long in the space bag flattened, he needed fluffed up. There are two dryer balls in there with him. They won’t hurt the dryer.”

“If you say so. And what is a ‘Bruce’?”

“Bruce is my boyfriend pillow.”

“You what?”

“Fine, it’s embarrassing confessions time. I need something to snuggle in my sleep. I’m a compulsive sleep snuggler. With Sam gone, I have to have something to snuggle or I’ll never get any sleep. I had a body pillow in high school, but I didn’t bring it to New York with me. After the incident, I was really depressed and my inability to sleep got worse. I survived on Ambien for months. I saw an ad for a boyfriend pillow. I ordered one. And it really did help. I ended up getting one for Rachel and Santana. I even gave Santana’s a sex change by altering a nightgown I bought and put on it instead of the boy pajama top it came wearing.”

“This sounds kind of creepy.”

“Maybe it is. It doesn’t have a head or anything. It’s like rectangular pillow with an arm sewn on it. You can see it when it comes out. I named mine Bruce.”

Kurt’s phone sounded with the Skype tone. He went in his room to pick it up off his desk. He answered it. “Adam. You made it.”

“I did, love. I just wanted to let you all know I’m here in one piece and my luggage made it with me. I’m in the flat and I’m standing on the front porch trying not disturb anyone since it’s 1:00 in the morning here.”

“Get some sleep. I’m glad you made it.”

“I’ll call again soon. Good night.”

Adam disconnected the call.

The dryer buzzed and Kurt went back out to the laundry closet. He pulled Bruce out and fished both of the dryer balls out and tossed his pajamas in and turned the dryer back on. Sebastian was still standing in the alcove.

“Sebastian, meet Bruce.”
Sebastian laughed. “It’s not creepy. It’s actually kind of cute. And if it helps you sleep and keeps you off Ambien, I like him a lot. I’m sure Sam was a better snuggler.”

“Shh. Don’t say that in front of Bruce. He’ll get a complex.”

Sebastian cackled. “Uh huh. It’s nice to meet you, Bruce. As long as you do your job, you’re welcome to stay in the apartment free of charge. But if you start snoring and keeping people awake, I’ll have to evict you.”

“He agrees to your terms.” Kurt made the pillow stick its hand out to shake with Sebastian.

“You’re crazy.”

“I know, but you like me anyway.”

“That’s true. Put Bruce in your room and let’s rewatch *The Librarians*.”
Monday morning, Kurt woke up having slept relatively decently, but not as well as he did when Sam was home. He got up, did his yoga, and got ready and left. He made it to the classroom where the camp assistants were meeting with 15 minutes to spare. He sat down and pulled his iPad out and attempted to compose an email to Adam, but came up blank. He didn’t have anything new to say, except to thank him for the gifts, which he wanted to do over Skype rather than in an email.

He pulled up his Vogue schedule for the afternoon to see if there was anything that was going to require him to leave the office to pick something up. There wasn’t anything. He put his iPad away and took a notebook and pen out of his bag so he’d be ready to take notes. Someone slid into the seat next to him and startled him.

“Hey, I didn’t mean to make you jump. Sorry.”

Kurt looked up, “Elliot. It’s good to see you. I didn’t realize that you would be at this meeting.”

“I think everyone who is part of the camp will be here. We’re all getting tours of where the students will be and learning what we’re expected to do. I think we’re dividing up after the tour of the building.”

“Makes sense. I’ve never been here before.”

“Me neither. I moved into the dorm last night. Couch surfing is not as fun as it sounds, but at least I didn’t have to pay to stay in a motel all week. How did your week with Adam go?”

“It was a lot of fun, and sad at the same time. He left yesterday morning.”

“I hope his play does well. That’s really exciting to get something he’s written funded and performed.”

“It really is. I am excited for him. I just wish someone here had bought the rights to produce it here. Just a bit of selfishness on my part.”

“No one likes to have a close friend move away.”

“I know.”

Several people dressed like they were in charge walked in and stood at the front of the room and everyone quieted down.

When the orientation ended at 11:00, Kurt headed straight to NYADA. He arrived an hour early, so he sat outside in the atrium at a picnic table and ate his lunch and read for a while. Afterwards, he went to Mr. Salazar’s office. Within a couple of minutes, he was called in.

“I’m sorry to ask you to see me during your lunch,” Kurt said when he sat down.

“I can eat lunch in an hour. I promise not to starve to death while we’re talking.”

Kurt smiled. “I’ll hold you to that.”

Mr. Salazar laughed. “I understand your scheduling conflict. You can’t leave the camp until noon
and takes a half-hour to get here. I’ll wait if you’re late. Subways are the best option, but not always the most timely.”

“Thanks.”

“So, what’s on your mind?”

“Adam left yesterday.”

“I knew you were dreading that.”

“It’s not actually him leaving that I want to talk about first.”

“Allright.”

“This is probably my least favorite topic, but I need some help figuring some things out.”

“Sex.”

“Sort of, but in the same area. Physical intimacy. I told you the last counselor I saw told me that I had problems with intimacy. I’m beginning to wonder if that was accurate, but that my understanding of the word intimacy was or is in accurate. I took it as my problems with Blaine had to do with my not being interested in having sex all the time.”

“The word gets used by itself a lot and commonly gets used as a euphemism for sex, so I can see how you might misinterpret the mean of the word, especially when you had sexual compatibility issues with Blaine.”

“So, Adam and I were talking, not doing anything. I didn’t allow that to happen. Even if I had thought I was ready, I couldn’t with him leaving. I wanted us to be on good terms when he left and for us to stay friends. So, anyway, we were talking and he said something about being able to say ‘no’. Where is that line in a relationship? Where is the line where what the other person wants is expected and ‘part of the deal’, so to speak? Does a line exist or once you’ve done something with someone does the line move to that point?”

“I’m not really quite following.”

“So, like a relationship is new and you offer our hand out to the person and they take it. From then on is handholding just expected or do you basically have to get permission each time you want to hold the person’s hand? And then how far does that extend? Once you’ve kissed? Made out? Taken clothes off? Gotten naked? Touched each other? Hand jobs? Is there some line where both parties are expected to just do whatever it is whenever one of them wants to do it?”

“You’re referring to consent. Does each person have to consent each time contact is initiated, is your question.”

“I guess so.”

“Well, not necessarily. But that line that you’re asking about depends on both people. Some people don’t want to be touched at all without giving their consent each time, even in a marriage.”

Kurt’s face relayed his confusion.

“For example, someone who has been sexually assaulted or mugged could be triggered by being touched without forewarning.”
“Oh, okay.”

“But it’s not always a matter of some type of past trauma, there are other neurological conditions that make people prone to overreact when startled. So, those people would want their boyfriend to say, I’m behind you before they put their hand on their boyfriend’s shoulders.”

Kurt nodded. “I get that there are special circumstances, but I’m more interested in just two typical people who are dating exclusively, engaged, or married. So, Kyle and Bill are dating and are exclusive and they’ve had sex.”

“Alright.”

“When Bill lets it be known that he wants to have sex, is Kyle obligated to oblige him? Does being in a serious relationship mean that Kyle needs to have sex with Bill just because Bill wants to?”

“Definitely not.”

“Really? Won’t Bill just get mad and ask him what the point in having a serious boyfriend is if Kyle isn’t willing to have sex with him?”

“If Bill reacts like that, then he’s immature, selfish, and controlling.”

“Oh. What if Kyle gives in even though he didn’t want to?”

“Then it’s sad for Kyle that he’s not enjoying one of the amazing parts of being in a relationship with someone. And depending on whether Kyle was coerced, even verbally, it’s a form of date rape. If Kyle says ‘no’ and Bill verbally pushes until Kyle just stops saying ‘no’, then Bill did not have Kyle’s consent.”

“Rape just sounds really violent.”

“Rape can be really violent. But it can also just be like any other sexual encounter, but when one person didn’t consent to participate. Words like ‘you owe me’ and ‘it’s your job to do this for me’ or ‘that’s what boyfriends do for each other’ or any number of guilt-inducing, manipulative words can precede rape. When one party is unconscious and can’t give consent, but the other person has sex with them anyway, there may be no force at all since the person can’t protest, but it’s still rape.”

“I guess I’m just not comfortable using that word to describe the situation. But what you’re saying is that there is a line that even married couples don’t cross without the actual consent of both parties.”

“I think for most people that line is the point at which something starts to happen to cause orgasms. From what I’ve read, a significant number of male gay couples never go quote ‘all the way’ unquote. And obviously two gay women lack a penis to penetrate each other. So, the definition of having sex can’t just be a penis being in a vagina. I’m not a sex expert, but when you’re talking about where a line is that consent starts coming into play, I think it’s the point when someone is intentionally doing something that has the potential to cause one or both of the parties to orgasm.”

“I guess that makes sense. Back to Kyle and Bill. Bill has a high sex drive and wants some sort of activity that leads to having a least one orgasm every night. God, this is embarrassing. But Kyle doesn’t feel the need to do this. Is it wrong of Bill to expect Kyle to fulfill this need? By providing a hand job or a blow job?”

“It IS wrong for Bill to expect Kyle to fulfill that need. I’m assuming that Bill has at least one
working hand. If he has the financial means, Bill can get himself a dildo or a flesh jack. Bill has ways provide himself with the nightly orgasm. Or Kyle can willingly participate in pleasuring Bill without feeling pressured to allow Bill to touch him and ‘return the favor’ or whatever the preferred terminology is. But I think expecting a blow job goes beyond the line of a reasonable request when the other party isn’t interested at the moment because that actually involves something other than touch. I would say the same thing about a woman. If she felt the need to orgasm every night, her partner could provide that by manual stimulation, but demanding oral every night I think goes across that line of what’s reasonable when the other person is offering to fulfill the desire, but doesn’t want it to be a mutual situation. But maybe that’s just me. I said I’m not a sex expert, but when you have two people with vastly different sex drives, communication has to be key. The one that has a high sex drive can’t just expect the other person to meet that every day. A partner doesn’t exist just to sexually pleasure the other person.”

“Okay. So, here’s a scenario. Bill sits near Kyle while they watch a movie. He scoots closer as the movie goes on. He starts to kiss Kyle on the neck and eventually gets Kyle on board and they start kissing. Bill is turned on and Kyle is not. He’s enjoying the kissing, but doesn’t want to move past that. He actually wants to watch the movie. So, Bill gets annoyed and climbs in Kyle’s lap and starts rolling his hips or he runs his hands down into Kyle’s lap to attempt to get him worked up by stimulating him. Kyle says, ‘not now’ or moves Bills hands or tries to get Bill to sit next to him. But Bill just keeps at it – doing things that he knows will turn Kyle’s body on, even if Kyle isn’t mentally or emotionally into it.”

“Sorry to interrupt, but Bill just crossed the line in my opinion. When Kyle makes it clear that he wants to stop at kissing and Bill doesn’t stop physically stimulating him, everything past that point is done without consent.”

“Even if Kyle quits saying ‘no’? Because as soon as Kyle quits saying ‘no’, Bill says, ‘See, I knew you were into it. You like it when I get a little pushy. You just like to play harder to get. You say ‘no’ to make me try harder.’”

Mr. Salazar firmly said, “No way.”

“No way?”

“At that point, Bill is way out of line. Unless the two of them agreed to some sort of role play where Kyle is the sub and has to do what Bill says within the scene they agreed to ahead of time, and the agreement was that Kyle would pretend to not be interested and Bill would pleasure him into being interested or something. Even subs have safe words so they can end a scene that they had previously agreed to.”

“I don’t know anything about that stuff.”

“That’s fine. What I think you need to know is that being someone’s boyfriend doesn’t mean giving up who you are. It doesn’t mean that your body becomes your boyfriend’s body to use as he sees fit. Your boyfriend never has the right to do anything to your body that makes you uncomfortable.”

“What if Kyle never feels like doing anything beyond kissing and snuggling?”

“Maybe Kyle falls on the asexual scale somewhere or maybe Bill just doesn’t turn him on. It’s also possible that at some point Bill did appeal to Kyle sexually, but after being coerced so many times, he no longer does.”

“But I’ve heard plenty of guys talk about breaking up with their girlfriends or ‘getting some on the
side’ when their girlfriends don’t have sex with them as often as the guys want to have sex. Isn’t that just part of being in a relationship? Willingly have sex with the other person?”

“Men who would break up with their girlfriends or boyfriends because they won’t have sex on demand should be up front with the people they’re interested in. If both people go into a relationship agreeing that they will have sex with the other person on demand, then that’s fine. But that is not the norm or the expectation. People should take into account their partner’s feelings. Someone can be 100% sexually attracted to their partner and just not be interested at that very moment. People aren’t always ready to have sex and they don’t have to be. If you look up some statistics, it might help you see things differently.”

“What kind of statistics?”

“Like when happy couples are surveyed, how often do those couples report that they have sex each week? I can guarantee the answer isn’t more than 7.”

“How many then?”

“Once.”

“No… seriously?”

“Yes. Seriously. The last study I saw showed that happy couples have sex once a week on average and that couples who had sex more often were not more happy, but that couples who didn’t have sex once a week on average, were less happy.”

“Wow.”

“I know I already stated this, but I am definitely not a qualified sex therapist. But what I’d like to transition this to is a talk about managing expectations in a relationship, and in that context sexual activity is one amongst many expectations.”

Alright.”

“So, back to Bill and Kyle. Bill seemed to have a lot of sexual expectations. It can also be that people have a lot of other types of expectations. For many, many years, it was expected that the woman would stay home and not work. That she would care for any children, do the housework, and the cooking. Men were expected to find jobs that could support their families and do the outdoor work and minor repair work at home. After the movement that pushed women into the workplace by choice or force, women still had the same expectations on them of caring for the children and doing the things they had done before they started to work. Things may be more evenly divided now than they were in the past, but it’s still not even. At least no study I’ve seen shows moms and dads doing equal amounts of housework and spending equal amounts of time with their children. Men still go out with their friends and keep their previous hobbies at a much higher rate than women do. But in a same sex relationship, how does that play out? Does one of the men get to decide that he’s the man, thereby pushing the other man to be the woman who gives up her past hobbies to be there for his man? Does one of them get pushed into the role of caregiver and homemaker? Is the one who does those things less valued than the one who is the ‘man’?”

“Are you asking me my experience or are you asking me how I think it should be?”

“Both. Either.”

“My experience is limited to my own past relationship because even at 22, I’ve never been close friends with another gay couple, so I have no one else’s experiences to draw on. In my experience,
my ex was the man. But at the same time, I was also the one working.”

“We’ve discussed this before, but you never asked my opinion on that. Do you want it?”

“Yes.”

“You’re ex was completely out of line. He should have provided the money to cover his own expenses, meaning whatever portion of the rent was reasonable based on how the living space was being divided up. If he moved all of his stuff into your personal space, then he should have paid half of what you were paying. At one point, there were three of you. If one person had half the space and the other two shared half the space, then it should have been one-half of the rent for the one person and one-quarter of the rent each for the other two. If there were three living spaces, it should have been divided into thirds for the rent. Now, the utilities should have been divided equally period. So, it would have been something like one-half the rent plus one-third of the utilities for the person who had their own room, and one-quarter of the rent plus one-third of the utilities for each of the people sharing the second room.”

Kurt laughed and shook his head. “I wish.”

“Well, that’s how it should have been, whether it was or it wasn’t. And in a relationship, I don’t think either person should have to give up their hobbies or their friends to appease the other. Anyone who expects their partner to give up their interests and friends is not the type of person who is a partner. They are a dictator of sorts. They make demands, and the other person acquiesces – over and over and over. And at some point, the person who gives in has nothing left to give up, but that doesn’t usually make the demanding one quit demanding things. They just get more nitpicky. You’ve already seen this. You lived through this.”

“I know.”

“And I’ve told you many times that your ex was unreasonable, but yet you still struggle to see that.”

“Not as much as I used to. I guess I just thought he was more that way than other guys, but I think I still thought a new person would be like that, just less so.”

“No. A man who values you as his partner will not make demands like that. If you had plans with a friend, George, and your boyfriend unexpectedly says, ‘Oh, I have time to go out tonight, let’s go out dancing’, or whatever, and you say, ‘I’m sorry. I already have plans with George.’ The boyfriend would not say for you to cancel your plans or try to worm his way into getting invited along or whine and act like a baby until you agree to ditch George.”

“Okay, so what would a man who values me say?”

“‘Oh, okay. Have fun!’ – said sincerely. Also, ‘When are you going to be back?’ might be a reasonable question – if it’s being asked just to ascertain information so he will be home when you will be so he can spend time with you because he wants to. But it’s not a reasonable question if it’s asked in a way that implies you better not stay out long or he’s going to stay home being mad at you until you get there, and then either take his anger out on you somehow or demand that you make it up to him somehow.”

“Okay.”

“That example is just another way of one person saying ‘no’ and being allowed to say ‘no’. ‘No, I can’t or don’t want to meet your demand.’ is a reasonable thing for a partner to say. No person can
meet someone else’s expectations all the time. That’s why I said that expectations should be discussed. So, let’s use Tom and John. Let’s say that Tom has zero free time for an entire week, so John made plans accordingly. But then suddenly Tom gets time off, like the power goes off where Tom works, so he can’t work. Tom really wants to spend his unexpected free time with John, so he calls him up and says, ‘I got off for the night. Do you want to go out dancing with me?’ John may very well say, ‘Yes!’ and call his friend George to cancel and apologize, and then go out with Tom. BUT Tom shouldn’t expect that to be the case. And he shouldn’t get angry if he gets turned down. Tom might be sad or disappointed, but anger is not a reasonable response.”

“Okay. So, how does someone go about discussing expectations ahead of time?”

“You just sit down and talk. If the person you’re interested in isn’t interested in discussing expectations, that’s probably a good sign that the person isn’t someone you want to get involved with. One thing that’s a good indicator is what happens when you don’t meet his expectations. What happens when you show up overdressed or underdressed or you cancel at the last minute for a real reason, like your train is so late that you’ll never make it to your reservation in time? What happens when you choose a restaurant and the food turns out to be terrible or the wait staff is poorly behaved? I’m not suggesting intentional sabotage, but seeing how someone reacts in those types of situations is very telling.”

Kurt nodded. He sat there not knowing how to explain his issues with feeling intolerable and feeling like people just put up with him because of things he could do for them. “Are a lot of people manipulative or have I just managed to find a large concentration of them in my lifetime?”

Mr. Salazar laughed. “People are people. And oftentimes the most driven people are the most manipulative people. They envision themselves at the top and they see everyone else as either helping them get there or hindering them from getting there. Those who will help them are assets and those who hinder them get pushed down so they can step on their backs to get higher. The only thing different about that at a performing arts school is that most of the people are actually GOOD at getting people to believe what is basically a lie and they’re often master manipulators because they’re so good at portraying whatever emotion it takes to persuade someone to do what they want.”

Kurt didn’t say anything.

“People whose career and life goal is for other people to watch them and applaud them are the most self-centered people you’ll ever meet. Honestly, what could possibly be more self-centered than getting up on a stage, alone or with back up, and having thousands of people looking at you and admiring you and wanting to be friends with you and wanting to BE you?”

“That’s true.”

“I’d have to say that people like you, who perform because they love it, are a lot more rare than the ones who are looking for accolades and fame. I would say that on the whole, it’s probably really hard to maintain a close friendship or a relationship with someone who is in direct competition for the roles or jobs you want, if the jobs are limited in number. It’s just human nature to be competitive and that much competition at a professional level would make having a personal relationship really hard. It’s really hard to be really upset about losing a role and be really happy for your boyfriend who got the role you wanted. You said you’ve been there before. I think a homosexual relationship between two musical theatre performers with the same vocal range might never work due to ongoing professional competition causing personal conflict in the relationship.”

“I can see that. And I’ll definitely give it a lot of thought when I consider dating again.”
“Are you still not feeling ready?”

“I think I probably am in some ways, but I need to think more about what we’ve talked about today because to be honest, my entire experience with having friends up until the last six months or so, was really just me wanting to not be alone more than I wanted anything else. I did a lot of things I didn’t really want to do to keep the peace. I’m just now coming to terms with the fact that people can actually want me around, that people want to spend time with me, and not just because I can do something for them. I’m more than the sum of my skills and their benefits to other people.”

“That’s good. Some relationships are based on mutual skill sharing. Like people who are on friendly terms with a plumber or an electrician.”

“Yeah, my dad had buddies like that. He’d fix their car for the cost of the parts in return for them fixing something around our house for the cost of the parts. It’s a mutually beneficial arrangement. But that’s not what I had within my group of friends.”

“And now you have something different with your more newly acquired group of people you’re friendly with. It’s a good start. And your dad’s term for people with mutually beneficial skills is sort of old-fashioned, but I like it because it distinguishes someone who is a friend from someone you do mutual favors for that you’re on friendly terms with.”

“Acquaintances’ sounds so stuffy and ‘buddy’ or ‘pal’ sounds old-fashioned, but English needs a good word for it. What I’m realizing is that most of the people I called my friends were never actually friends. They were classroom companions or teammates if you think of a show choir as a team. I’m close to letting it all go and being able to move on. I think finally being able to put some terms on everything and redefining what I want in relationships is where I am and once I make it over his last hurdle of figuring out how to communicate those wishes to others respectfully will be where the past won’t be interfering in my present or future anymore.”

“I’d like to get back to what you said at the beginning. You said that your use of the word intimacy falls in line with it being commonly used as a polite substitute for the word sex. I’d like to talk about it in other contexts. In psychology, different types of intimacy are discussed – intellectual, spiritual, emotional, experiential, and physical intimacy. It’s possible that the first therapist you went to see was going to base your sessions as therapy sessions around learning about those different types of intimacy, whereas our meetings haven’t been therapy, but more counseling. You come in and talk about things and I do my best to help guide you into seeing where your thoughts are jumbled and help you attempt to sort them out for yourself. The first person you went to may have been more like a teacher, wanting to teach you about the different types of intimacy as a way to help you identify problem areas in your life.”

“Alright. I could see how that could have been the case, but if that was the idea, it was poorly executed because it wasn’t explained properly to me. I’ve never really heard of the other four things you mentioned as types of intimacy.”

“In this particular context of the five different types of intimacy, I can agree that I think you have trouble with them. But I think it is linked to the very issue that you brought up about expectations and you flat out asking me about how does someone go about discussing expectations. If you can’t ask someone in your life about their expectations, that makes me wonder about the power balance in that relationship.”

“What do you mean?”

“In a relationship where the power balance is even, most people have no trouble sharing their expectations with each other. But when the power balance is uneven, the only person sharing their
expectations is the one with all the power.”

Kurt sat there and tried to let what had been said sink in and make sense.

“Here’s an example. You get a new job. Your boss gives you a long list of expectations. When to show up, what to wear, how to behave, what to do while you’re working, what not to do, where you can be, where you can’t be, etc.”

“Right.”

“But the employee gets to make no such statement of expectations.”

“Okay.”

“Small children are another example. Parents of toddlers have all the power. They decide when the child has to go to bed and get up, what the child will wear and eat, what toys they’re allowed to have, what TV shows they can watch, etc. The toddler may decide to rebel and make their expectations known, such as yelling ‘I won’t eat peas.’ But in the end, the parent can refuse to give the toddler something that had previously been offered. The child has no real negotiation options. As children grow up, the balance of power shifts until it is even, or at least that’s how it’s supposed to work. But I think that in all of your relationships until recently, you have given the other people the power. You felt inferior. You wanted the other person to be a part of your life badly enough to give them most of the power. And that prevented you from having the emotional intimacy that close friendships provide. The difference between your friendships with Sam, Sebastian, and Adam when compared to your previous friendships from my perspective is that the balance of power is even. The three of them respect you and your autonomy and see you as their equals. You’ve always pointed out that before Sam got whammied by the Blaine-effect that he didn’t treat you differently. You said that Adam had always been respectful. And after Sebastian apologized, his actions and words have shown that he considers you his equal.”

“I think I get it. The outcome of all of this is my ‘trouble with intimacy’, which I misconstrued as my inability to feel like having sex all the time.”

“I think that is more likely because I think you fall on the asexuality spectrum.”

“But I don’t dislike sex or want to be celibate.”

“Again, another misunderstanding of a word due to its improper usage.”

“So, explain it to me please.”

“Asexuality is a spectrum from never being sexually attracted to anyone to only feeling sexual attraction to someone you’re emotionally close to, the latter being often referred to as ‘gray asexuality’. And I think that from everything you’ve told me about your previous relationship, you weren’t quite there with being ready to have sex when you gave in and went ahead and did. And you did it for the wrong reason – to keep him from leaving you. But you wanted to keep him, so you kept it up. And you were right in your assessment of him. As soon as you weren’t readily available to provide what he wanted, he cheated on you and blamed you for it when really you had nothing to do with his choice. He could have picked up his phone and broken up with you via text, even standing on the other guy’s doorstep. He didn’t have to cheat on you to get what he wanted. He could have gotten what he wanted freely from any number of guys willing to give it to him with no strings attached. But you accepted the blame and eventually agreed to marry him when you had been broken up for nearly six months. But from your own account, you didn’t come back from getting engaged with your emotional attachment restored – you came back with a
renewed sense of obligation. Only you wore an engagement ring. The power balance in your relationship wasn’t even. You couldn’t live together. I think that you were in a sexual relationship with someone that you were not emotionally, intellectually, or spiritually intimate with, and barely experientially intimate with. You said that he was spending more time with Sam than with you. That is what I’m referring to as experientially intimate, sharing experiences with someone. And I think that you are not the type of person who feels sexually attracted to someone that you’re not intimate with in those other areas, despite the fact that you didn’t have the vocabulary to explain it clearly.”

“So, gray asexuality is a description of someone who doesn’t feel sexually attracted to someone they’re not already emotionally close to.”

“Pretty much.”

“So, I’m not a prude or frigid?”

“A prude is someone who more than likely feels just as sexually aroused as any else, but refuses to act on their desires in order to laud their moral superiority. Someone who is frigid is intentionally not acting on their sexual desires or refusing to engage in sexual behavior with someone and they get called that word because they aren’t doing what the other person wants.”

“So, a frigid person is basically a person who says ‘no’, but whose refusal is listened to, but their partner complains about it and lets other people know?”

“Pretty much. That’s how ‘frigid’ ends up paired with ‘bitch’ a lot. Men get angry when they’re turned down, but I guess the upside is that if they’re calling the women names over it, maybe they’re not forcing themselves on the women, just humiliating them. Not that either is the right way to behave.”

“I have a lot to think about.” Kurt looked up at the clock. “I need to get going or I’m going to be late for work.”

“I think this week, I’d like you to keep going with your plans of working on defining what you want in relationships. Be sure to write it down in the notebook. Also, look through the notebook. Go through and see what still sort of stabs at your heart when you read it. It will help you figure out what you might still need to work on. And it will help you see how far you’ve come. Use a different colored pen this time and mark on the pages with answers you’ve figured out or just to put check marks next to things you’ve worked through successfully.” He pulled out a sheet of paper and used his computer. “I want you to read this article before you do those other things.”

Kurt took the piece of paper and put it in his bag. “I’ll read it. Looking through the notebook is a good idea. A lot of times when I feel like I’ve made progress, several more issues pop up, but seeing how many I’ve worked through will help me feel like I’m making progress. I’ll see you next week.” Kurt grabbed his bag and headed out the building.

By the end of the week, Kurt and Sebastian had their new routine down. Adam Skyped with them when Kurt got home from work, oftentimes while they ate dinner. Kurt had managed to write Adam a real letter and sent it to him. Sam came back Friday evening, as planned. He was there when Adam called.

“Congratulations!” They all said together as they answered the Skype call. They positioned themselves and Kurt’s laptop so Adam could see all three of them.
“Thank you. It was amazing! Seeing my work on the stage and seeing people enjoy – it was just the best feeling.”

“I bet. We’re all really happy for you,” Sam said.

“We are,” Kurt added.

Sebastian said, “Send us some photos or something.”

“I will.”

The three of them continued to eat and talk to Adam while he had a post-performance, nearly-midnight snack.

The following Monday, the first day of camp was devoted to tours of the universities with music, drama, and musical theatre departments. The first hour and a half was at NYU with one of the other assistants giving the tour. They walked from NYU to NYADA where Kurt gave the tour. When the tour was over, Kurt stayed behind. The students went to lunch together, with the tours continuing that afternoon. After his session with Mr. Salazar, Kurt went to work.

The second day of camp, they actually began to work on their musicals. Kurt was happy to be assigned to *Grease*. As much as he loved *West Side Story*, he was glad to not be working with that group. Kurt’s role was one of support. He helped the students with their lines, he worked with them one on one and he also oversaw groups working together on scenes. He also worked with the students who were working on the costuming, giving them fitting and sewing tips, and general advice on how to make the costumes both look good and be easy to get on and off.

He and Elliott ran into each other a lot since Elliott was doing the exact same thing that Kurt was. They ate lunch together every day except Mondays, which allowed them to get to know each other better without the pressure of it feeling like they were dating.

The evening of the second Monday of the camp, Kurt entered the apartment building and he was stopped by the security officer on duty.

“Mr. Hummel, a word, please?”

“Sure.” He stopped and stepped over to the counter.

“This afternoon a young woman came by and left this envelope for you. She said she was certain that you lived here, but she knew we couldn’t confirm or deny it. She said if you didn’t live in the building anymore to just rip it up and toss it out.”

“Alright. Thank you.” He opened the envelope and immediately recognized Rachel’s handwriting. “She does know I live here. Thank you for the envelope.”

“You’re welcome.”

Kurt waited for the elevator and rode it up to their floor. He washed up and sat down to eat and Skype, leaving the envelope in his satchel to deal with later.

Once dinner and the dishes were done, he got ready for bed early and piled the pillows up on his
bed and leaned against the headboard with Rachel’s letter. He pulled it out and this time he realized that there was something else in the envelope. He pulled out four tickets for the show Rachel and Jesse were in. He put them back in and sat the envelope on his side table. He sat with the letter in his hands for a few minutes before he unfolded it and started to read it.

Dear Kurt,

I know that you probably don’t want to hear from me and I’ll understand if you don’t show up to the show Friday night.

After our meeting at the coffee shop back in December, I continued to live with Blaine for about a month until I found my own place and I could move in. I’m living in a shoebox here on the Upper West Side now.

I started going to see a therapist right after I moved here. My dads actually had that as one of their requirements for helping me with the money I needed to move back to New York. They pointed out that I had been through a lot of changes in a fairly short period of time and that I need someone to help me sort my life out so that I wouldn’t just get here and back out of my role again when things got hard.

After seeing the therapist for a few weeks, I started to open up more. After a few whiny sessions where I bemoaned my lot in life, my therapist basically said I was an adult and I needed to learn to behave like one and that my options were to stick with her and take the therapy seriously or find someone else. I stuck with her.

A lot of things that I had never dealt with came out. And you, Blaine, Finn, and Santana were the topic of discussion many times. I have learned that I am incredibly self-centered. My therapist thinks I could be the poster child for ‘spoiled-rotten, only-child divas’. She obviously doesn’t mince words.

I don’t really know how to write all of this in a letter, but in time I realized that I was a terrible friend to you, if what I was can even be described as “friend”. Even after this much time seeing the therapist, I’m not sure that I know how to be anyone’s friend.

I needed to hear the truth. You tried to tell me so many times, but all I could hear was that you were jealous of me. All I could see was that I was successful and you weren’t, so you said things to me to bring me down. Mr. Schue never chose you for a solo. I got into NYADA, and you didn’t. I was better than you. That’s what I needed to believe. And I needed you and everyone else to believe it too.

I was not a nice person. I honestly can’t believe you stuck with me as long as you did. I would like to apologize in person, but as I said, if you don’t come Friday, I’ll understand.

I’m hoping that you will come and that you’ll meet me Saturday morning for breakfast at the Copper Cup where Sam works at 8:00. I’ll be there whether you come or not.

Rachel

Kurt read through the letter a second time. He struggled to see it as sincere, but in all the years he had known Rachel, he had rarely seen her apologize. He decided to call it a night and attempt to go to sleep.

The next morning, when Sebastian came out to the kitchen for breakfast, Kurt told him about the
tickets while he was making his breakfast and lunch.

“Do you want to go?”

“Yes and no. I’ve not gone to a Broadway show since I’ve lived here, so I would like to go, but I’m not sure that I’m up for watching Rachel. Can I think about it?”

“Sure. If you don’t want to go, I understand. But if you don’t want to go, I’ll see if someone else wants the ticket, so just let me know.” Kurt left his lunch on the counter and took his plate of food to the table to sit down to eat breakfast. He sat facing the kitchen so they could still talk.

“I will. Why are you going to go?” Sebastian got some eggs out and started making himself breakfast.

“If she wants a chance to apologize, I will give it to her. It just seems the right thing to do. That doesn’t mean that she’s going to have a place in my life, but I know that working through the past mistakes and dealing with the consequences is hard. If she wants closure, I’ll at least give her a chance. If she starts to justify what she did or blame shift it back on me, I’ll get up and leave Saturday morning. Sam will be there, not sitting with me, but at least in the room. I’m not afraid of her or being drawn back into her lair. I’m not even afraid of being drawn back to Blaine anymore. I’ve moved past that being a possibility.”

“Good.”

“I spent a lot of time looking through the notebook I was writing everything in and the things I wrote don’t make my heart race or cause me anxiety anymore. A lot of them still make me angry at him and at myself, but that’s different than feeling like maybe I could have or I should have done something differently to make it work out. At first, a lot of what I wrote were things I considered to be mistakes that I had made and things I blamed him for. And now I can see a bigger picture – how he was in the wrong, how I was in the wrong, and how he has no intentions of anything being different except my reactions to his expectations. Talking to the counselor has made me see things differently. The last couple of weeks, I’ve been talking about managing expectations in relationships. And I’ve learned that I’ve always been far too willing to give than I should have been. And far less willing to share any desires or expectations of my own with any of my friends than I need to be. Just a silly example, I would always answer when someone called or texted. Even though I frequently texted or called people and didn’t get an immediate reply or had to leave a voicemail. And that small issue led to an imbalance because when I didn’t immediately pick up or reply, I would get sarcastic texts or irate voicemails. So, I’d double-down on never making people wait, even though I just chalked up not getting an immediate reply as the other person being busy. The more I never ignored a text or call, the more everyone expected that to be the norm and the more agitated they got when I didn’t meet their expectations. So, in their minds it turned into me being intentionally rude and ignoring people if I didn’t answer right away. But it didn’t change the other direction. I was still expected to be okay with waiting for my text or call to be returned.”

Sebastian plated his eggs, poured himself some juice, and sat down across from Kurt. “So, when taking other situations into consideration that made you into a doormat all around. Rachel wanted to go out and if you said ‘no’, she’d throw a fit. So, to shut her up, you’d go ahead and change your plans. And she’d be happy. But those types of things eventually get to where the person is never happy, only angry if you don’t just automatically change your plans to align with theirs.”

“Exactly. I’ve not dealt with that with you, Sam, or Adam. I made my general lack of availability known up front. It felt really weird at the time. I felt like I was being uncaring by saying I’d never have any free time. But it was really my first foray into sharing my expectations. My expectations were for you to have low expectations of my availability. I needed you to expect to hear ‘no’ as the
default answer from me about whether I would be available and that any ‘yes’ you got would be out of the norm. But that’s exactly what I needed to do, even though it felt so weird at the time. We’ve had no trouble spending time together with whoever was available whenever. No one has gotten their feelings hurt because one person couldn’t make it. No pouting, whining, or ignoring until the other person gave in and participated. It seems so stupid and insignificant, but for me it’s completely different.”

“I can see that.”

“Previously, if someone had said, ‘Let’s go out tonight.’ when I had a lot of homework, I would have gone because I preferred facing the consequences of staying up half the night or getting up early or giving up something I had planned the next day for myself just to avoid the consequences of saying ‘no’ and upsetting whoever it was. And then other times when I was too stressed out, I would just blow up, and then everyone would call me a drama queen and tell me to get over myself.”

Sebastian laughed.

“I’ve never claimed to be a saint in all of this. I know I was a participant. I just kept going along with things, sometimes willingly, sometimes not, sometimes being a bitch about it. But still staying. I’d stand up for myself in a few areas like the way I dressed, but not at all in others. I was a mess. But moving forward, I’ve learned a lot and the biggest thing seems to center around managing expectations. You laid yours out very clearly when you let us move in. This is your place, which you kept immaculate and where you studied. We moved in and we lived up to those expectations. I think living here with you has worked.”

“It has. You and Sam have been very respectful. Sam found a place to do his artwork besides the apartment, while meeting up people and being his extroverted self. He didn’t impose that side of himself on us, but he didn’t give it up either. Rather than sit around and mope or watch TV all evening, he went out and found a place to do what he enjoys.” Sebastian grabbed Kurt’s empty plate and his own and put them in the dishwasher. He washed the skillet he had used and put it in the dish drain while Kurt was talking.

“We don’t steal each other’s food. We don’t leave messes behind that someone else has to take care of. We don’t barge in with guests in tow disturbing each other’s study time or sleep. These are all things that are all expectations I had of how roommates should be that the other people I lived with never lived up to. I was told that I was being unreasonable. And every time I had to buy food to replace food other people had eaten, I was never reimbursed. I finally gave up even complaining about it because it was pointless. I got used to every personal boundary I had set being trampled. But I stayed. When Santana crossed Rachel’s boundaries, Rachel left. When Rachel got mad at Santana one time, Santana moved out. Blaine moved out at one point. I stayed. I own that. Anyway, now I’m working through the notebook in an act of closure. Looking to see if there are still things I need to deal with, and honestly, Rachel is one of them. If I ever start auditioning for roles, there’s a good chance that she and I will run into each other professionally. I’d like to close the previous drama and move to an adult interaction level. Even if the interaction is purely professional. I want the pettiness to end. I’m going to give it a shot.”

“I guess that makes sense. Obviously, you can move on. The two of us are proof of that.” Sebastian sat back down at the table.

“Definitely. I’m not looking to befriend her right now or maybe ever. But I’d like to move past the point of dreading running into her somewhere.”

“I’ll go with you to see the musical.”
“Really?”

“Yeah. If it’s terrible, I’m leaving at the intermission and I’ll meet up with you afterwards, though.”

Kurt rolled his eyes. “That’s fine. I’m going to have breakfast with her Saturday morning at the Copper Cup. Sam already told us he took the morning shift as a favor to someone. So, he won’t be ready to go until noon anyway.”

“Did we even pick a place to go this weekend? I kept falling asleep while we were talking Saturday night.”

“We decided on a free art exhibit Sam told us about and a string quartet in the park afterwards.”

“That’s right. You’re right.” Sebastian stood up. “I have to go get ready. I’ll see you later.”

“Yeah. I need to get going too.” Kurt picked his lunch up and put it in his bag and headed out.

At lunch, Kurt and Elliott sat together. He was the next one Kurt told about the tickets. He figured the fourth ticket was supposed to be for Adam since Rachel probably didn’t know he had gone back to England the previous week, but Kurt didn’t mention that to Elliott.

“So, do you want to go with us?”

“Not really, but maybe I should. I’m not sure what I’m going to be doing in the future. And I get what you’re saying about closure. She and I didn’t part on good terms really and we just began to mutually ignore each other, but it’s been a long time. Maybe we could move to mutual indifference. It’s time to just let it all go. She and I were never close enough to really justify my level of aggravation with her. I think it was probably more indignation for you than it was for me. She wasn’t a nice person to you and you valued her friendship above your own needs. Anyway, if you’re ready to move past all of that, I should move past it too.”

“Please don’t go on my account. I have unfinished business with her, but I don’t want you to feel obligated at all. I can just post the ticket on the NYADA board and I’m sure someone will be thrilled. Or you can go with us just because you want to, but not out of any sense of obligation.”

“I’ll go. I may not stick around to talk to her, but seeing a Broadway show for free is a good deal. Plus, if any of the kids in the camp ask whether it’s worth choosing that show on the nights we go out, I’ll have an informed opinion.”

“This camp is the kind of thing I would have loved, but we could have never afforded it until after my dad got elected and by then it was too late.”

“Yeah, I wouldn’t have been able to afford something like this either, but it is definitely cool. I figure there’s several kids here whose parents are hoping that this little fling with theatre will get it out of their systems and they’ll come around to seeing their parents’ perspectives on why being a performer isn’t a good idea.”

“Probably. I went to a private school for a while and I can see those parents doing something like that. And it might actually work. If someone had sat down with me or if I had taken the time to do the research myself, I would have realized what a risky career choice it is in such an expensive city. I still haven’t decided whether staying here is a good idea or not.”
“Yeah, me neither.”

They talked for a little while longer before Elliott had to get back to work. Kurt texted Sam on his walk from Barnard to the subway and Sam agreed to go to the show as well.

Saturday morning, Kurt entered the Copper Cup a little before 8:00. He stepped inside to find Rachel sitting at a table with Blaine and a guy that looked like he could be Chandler. Kurt turned and walked out the door. Rachel came running out onto the sidewalk.

“Kurt! Kurt, stop!”

He stopped walking.

She approached him quickly and moved to face him. “I SWEAR to you that I did not know he would be there. I did not invite him to sit with me. I don’t even know how he knew I was there.”

“Get your phone out.”

“What? Why?”

“Just do it. And unlock it.”

She did what he asked. He held his hand out. He pulled her to the edge of the building they were standing near to get out of the way of the people walking on the sidewalk.

“Look. See this app? He’s using it to track your location. He had added me and Sam, but Sam fixed it. Let me look.” He removed Rachel’s permission to share her location. “There. Now, he can’t track you anymore.”

“Thank you. I swear I didn’t know.”

“I believe you. Obviously, we need to go somewhere else.”

“I know where we can go.” She started to walk towards Central Park. A couple of blocks down, she crossed the street, and started walking east. “I walked past a place once. Plus, I live the other direction, so if he thinks we headed toward my place, he’ll be going the wrong direction if he tries to figure out where we went.”

“Did he introduce you to who he was with?”

“He started to. He said that he was there with a friend of his from NYU when he got in line behind me and acted like it was a huge coincidence. I sat down by myself, but he had just gotten whoever it was to move over after I sat down. He hadn’t gotten to his name yet.”

“He looks a lot like what I imagine Chandler would look like at our age.”

“THE Chandler?”

“I think so, but the last time I saw him he looked a lot more geeky chic with black glasses and a beanie, not traditionally handsome like the guy with Blaine in there. And I talked to him for less than two minutes, so I could be imagining things, but he did say he was auditioning for NYU.”

“Here’s the place.” She stopped and pulled the door open and went inside.
Kurt stepped in behind her. “This is a restaurant. I’m not budgeted to eat breakfast in expensive places like this. We need to go find a coffee shop.”

“I invited you out. I’m paying.” She grabbed his hand and stepped towards the greeter.

“Right this way.”

“Could we have a booth please?”

“Of course.” The server showed them to a booth and handed them menus.

Rachel indicated for Kurt to sit facing away from the people in the restaurant, and then she sat down and made him scoot over. “I want to talk, but not where everyone can hear and I don’t want to be watched either. I’m not famous, but people do recognize me from time to time and I’m not interested in a meet and greet this morning.”

Kurt slid down the seat leaving room for Rachel to sit comfortably. He opened his menu and looked at the choices. “The show was really good. We all liked it. You and Jesse are really good together.”

“Thank you. I appreciate you all coming. I didn’t know that you and Elliott were friends again. I sent the ticket for Adam.”

“I figured. But Adam went back to London two weeks ago tomorrow. I ran into Elliott in Central Park …” Kurt paused to think. “Four weeks ago. He was having a friend take some graduation photos.”

“Wow. So, he finished up at NYU then?”

“He did. He and I both got positions at the high school theatre camp that’s being hosted at Barnard College. So, I see him weekdays now. I asked him Tuesday if he wanted to come.”

When the waitress came around, they placed their orders, and gave the menus back.

Once the waitress walked away, Rachel began to speak again. “If it’s okay with you, I’d like to go ahead and say what I have to say and we can talk more afterwards if you want.”

“Sure.”

“First off, I want to apologize for the most recent thing I did. I stood there last fall in the hall at McKinley and let Santana rip you to shreds. You stood up for her so many times and I stood there feeling – I honestly don’t even know what I was feeling. You gave up your internship here to go help me in Ohio and I was condescending and made everything about me.”

Kurt nodded in agreement, but didn’t speak since Rachel had asked him to let her get things off her chest.

“Jesse has actually been a big help. He may have been terrible to everyone back in high school, but he’s grown up a lot and learned a lot of things the hard way. And he doesn’t put up with my diva attitude.”

“That’s a surprise, but a good one.”

Rachel nodded and continued. “One thing you said to me back in high school struck me as really odd and it always stuck with me. I said something about how alike we were and you responded
with “That’s a terrible thing to say.” I think it stuck with me because it made no sense to me at the
time and I couldn’t figure it out. But what I’ve realized since then is that Blaine and I are a lot
more alike than anyone I’ve ever met. I saw myself in him. I saw that he had what I wanted. People
gravitated to him where I always managed to annoy people. I was willing to share being the center
of attention with him. I wanted people to want me to be the center of attention like they did with
him.”

“The two of you are more alike than you and I ever were. And you’re right. You’re both attention
hogs.”

Rachel obviously struggled with defending herself by her reaction. She took a deep breath and
nodded. Once she had composed herself again, she said, “After going to therapy and being required
to study my life more rigorously than any class I’ve ever taken, I realized that I wanted a ‘Blaine’
for myself. Not only did I want to be the center of attention. I wanted to be with someone who was
the center of everyone’s attention. I had that with Finn in a way. He was the quarterback and
everyone liked him. Being his girlfriend made me part of that.”

“I can see that. You and Quinn both wanted what Finn’s status as top dog offered you.”

“If Blaine had been bisexual, he would have been the perfect match for me, or at least that’s how I
saw it. He is interested in what I am, whereas Finn never was. I couldn’t even get Finn to try out
for West Side Story. He spent the day at NYADA with me and felt like a fish out of water, but
Blaine could have been that perfect lead man for me.”

Kurt just let her continue.

“I saw him as my perfect performing partner, and since I viewed you as this gay male twin version
of myself, I couldn’t see anything other than Blaine being your perfect partner and your soulmate.”

Kurt took a deep breath to refrain from lashing out, but didn’t quite manage to keep his eyebrows
from going up and rolling his eyes a bit. “Mmm hmm.”

“And my pact with Blaine was beyond terrible and there is no excuse or reason I could offer that
would be remotely acceptable.”

“That’s true.” Rachel did not know about Scandals and he had no intention of her finding out, so he
let the subject drop.

The waitress walked up and put their plates down.

“Thank you,” they said in unison. They started to eat as they talked.

“He and I are not close anymore. I’ve learned a lot about how manipulative he is since I came back
to New York. I saw the man behind the curtain that I had never allowed myself to see when the
two of you were together. When I saw him continue to post things on his Facebook page that made
it look like the two of you were together, I told him that you had asked him not to do that and that if
he wanted there to be any chance that you’d get back with him that he should stop and abide by
your wishes.”

“So, at that point, you were still Team Blaine.”

“Well, Team Klaine, I guess. I only knew his side of things because you weren’t talking to anyone,
but he played the whole thing off in Lima as a big NYADA catastrophe that you had to go back to
New York to solve. And given how dramatic professors can be at a drama school and with all of
the commotion with the school and Sue after that, no one bothered to ask me and even I didn’t
bother to ask anyone else. Having the FBI skulking around and asking everyone questions and the police interviewing teachers and the school shut down really distracted anyone from wondering why you didn’t come back to the school after the wedding. He never admitted to anyone that you had left him and that you didn’t go through with the legal aspect of the ceremony. Even I didn’t know that when I moved in with him. I didn’t know exactly what was going on, but obviously I saw that you weren’t living with him like I thought you were.”

“Alright. So, you were still Team Klaine and told him that he was never going to win me back by going against my wishes…”

“Right. His response must have been to set his Facebook posts to filter me out of being able to see those types of posts. You know the option that allows you to block certain friends from seeing your post.”

“Right.”

“That was back early winter when I confronted him about it. I didn’t see any more post like that, so I thought he had finally quit. I didn’t realize that he was still making those types of posts until this past week when someone I hadn’t seen in a while, who I will not name, asked me about how the two of you were, like you were still together. I answered saying that I hadn’t seen either of you in a while since I was so busy with the show. I don’t know what he’s been posting, but obviously it’s leading people to believe you’re still together. I just answered non-committally because honestly, it’s not my issue to make comments on.”

“I appreciate you staying out of it. And your answer was a good one. Now, that you’ve seen me, feel free to tell people that I’m doing great because that’s the truth.”

“I’m glad to hear that. I am saddened to realize that it took you breaking away from pretty much everyone to make that happen, though.”

They sat in silence for a while, eating their food while it was warm. When they had finished, they pushed their plates away from them and continued to talk.

Rachel said, “I know that apologizing solves nothing and doesn’t change the past. And while I have found success on Broadway, it’s a lot emptier success without anyone to share it with. I had my dream role and walked away for something shinier. I have a lead role again and I enjoy working with Jesse, but it is lonely going home to an empty apartment. I know I brought it on myself, and I’m going to keep seeing my therapist. One other thing I’ve learned is that the therapist I had in Lima was not really helpful. She was more like a sounding board or a person to vent to, but mostly just boosted my ego and made me feel like what I wanted was reasonable.”

“That’s not really a therapy or counseling.”

“No, it’s not. Anyway, I don’t expect you to forgive me, but I would like you to accept my apology. It doesn’t change anything or make anything better, but I hope it at least allows you to know that I’m trying to improve myself. I’m learning to be an adult and accept the consequences to my actions and choices and not just shift the blame or insist that I was treated unfairly.”

“That’s a good start.”

“I appreciate you coming last night and you being willing to meet me today. And thanks for turning that app off. That’s a creepy thing to do to someone.”

“Sam is the one who asked me about it last fall. He turned it off on my phone. You might consider
changing your passcode.”

“I’ll do that. You mentioned working at a theatre camp at Barnard College. What else are you up to?”

“Back to working at Vogue. And of course, I’ll start my last year at NYADA this fall.”

“Are you going to continue to live with Sebastian and Sam?”

“If I hadn’t been able to move in with Sebastian, I might have had to sit out a semester of school and work until the fall and start again, if Madame Tibideaux would have even approved that. Going to Ohio cost me a fortune. It’s taken me 5 months to pay my credit card off from dropping the internship and picking up the two classes I needed to stay full time and not fall behind.”

“Oh. I had no idea.”

“I’m sure you didn’t because your dads just paid your bills. Until you started working at the dinner for ‘real life working experience’, you had never worked a day in your life and even when you worked, your dads still paid your half of the expenses. While on the other hand, I worked two jobs for a lot of it and went to school full time and struggled to pay half of everything while no one else helped out, despite using water, electricity, gas, and helping themselves to my food frequently.”

“You’re right. You’re right. I never needed to work. And I did just abandon you. I never even considered the money issue. I know that I wasn’t a good friend or even a decent person a lot of the time.”

“I had to sell everything off and move into the dorm when you didn’t come back before the lease was up. Your dads said they wouldn’t continue to pay half of the rent, which of course made sense. When you moved out, they quit paying half of the utilities, which made my expenses go up quite a bit. Blaine never helped with any of the rent or anything. There’s a lot that you don’t know that I’m not going to tell you because it doesn’t involve you, but none of it is good.”

“Well, after I realized that he was still posting stuff online after you asked him not to, I decided to contact you. I knew you had asked me to remove myself from your story, as you phrased it. And I did, until I just needed to somehow let you know that he was still posting about you.”

“He still goes to the Copper Cup when Sam’s working, even though we asked him to stay away. There’s nothing that Sam can do about it. Sam just does his job and ignores him when he’s there.”

“I just want to make sure you know that I am not trying to reinsert myself in your life after you asked me to stay away.”

“I appreciate the fact that you abided by my wishes. I needed time to regroup. I’m going to attempt to talk to him one last time. I’m not sure when, but fairly soon.”

Rachel took a sip of her tea. “I could sit here and list all of the things I have come up with that I did that I know were hurtful, but that would just rehash the past and change nothing. I just want you to know that I am really sorry.”

“I accept your apology, Rachel. I do hope you understand that me accepting your apology is not going to make us friends.”

“I know. But I hope it can make you not cringe at seeing each other or at potentially working together some day. Should we ever be in that position, I’d like to start with a blank slate.”
“As long as that blank slate includes you understanding that I’m never going to allow myself back into the role of your constant cheerleader and ego soother again.”

“I understand.”

“I’m glad you’ve gotten some help. You are wildly talented. You always have been. Realizing that you aren’t the center of the universe will help you be even better because it will allow you to see yourself more honestly and actually work on your weaker areas making you a better performer overall.”

“That’s true. I need to head out to do a few errands before I have to go to the theater. I’m glad you came. And I’m glad you’re doing well.” She picked up the bill and looked at it. She pulled cash out of her purse and put it on the table. She slid out of her seat and stood at the end of the table. She smoothed her skirt and waited for Kurt to slide out.

He walked with her to the door and opened it, allowing her to step outside. “Thank you for breakfast. It was quite good.”

“I agree. Thanks again for meeting me.”

He nodded. “I’m glad I did.”

They walked back the way they came. They went their separate ways after a couple of blocks.

Kurt opened the apartment door to find Sebastian sitting on the sofa reading the *Brisingr*. “You decided you liked it enough to read the whole series?” He closed and locked the door behind him.

“I did. How did your meeting go?”

“I’m glad I went. We’re not going to be new BFFs or anything, but she apologized and I know she’s an actor, but I’m 99% sure she was being sincere. She didn’t ask me to forgive her, just to accept her apology. She didn’t justify her previous actions or whine at all. She just admitted to the things she apologized for.”

“Well, that sounds sincere.”

“I want to meet with Blaine. It’s time to end his charade. I’ve given him over six months. Time’s up.”

“I’m not sure what you’re referring to, but I would be glad to accompany you to whatever meeting you set up with him.”

“Thanks.”

Kurt went down to his room and grabbed the book he was reading of Sebastian’s and took it back to the living room with him.

“That’s the third book, isn’t it?”

“It is. I really like them. I couldn’t get books like this easily. It was easy enough to get classics, but popular books were just not readily available.”

They read until a little before noon, when they got up to make lunch. They had finished by the time Sam came in. He changed his clothes quickly and sat down to eat with them.
“Good chicken salad.”

“Thanks,” Kurt said. “So, this art show?”

“Yeah, yeah. It’s like a street fair down not far from where the co-op is. It’s not huge or anything, but quite a few people from the co-op are setting up to sell some of their stuff.”

“Sounds cool,” Sebastian said.

“I thought it would be nice to see some of them. And the string quartet is just a small thing as far as I know. I figured we’d just take that cool waterproof picnic blanket we got at Costco, and we can just sit and listen. It’s probably just going to be like a half-hour to an hour long. One of the guys in the quartet came in and put a flyer up at the coffee shop. It’s free, so I figured, why not?”

“Sure. I’m all for free performances,” Kurt said. He jumped when his phone rang. “Oh, sure. I’ll be right down.”

Sam and Sebastian looked at him, waiting for him to say something.

“The security desk called up. Rachel left something again. I’ll be right back.” Kurt was back 10 minutes later with another envelope that was still sealed.

“What did she leave this time?”

“I have no idea.” He sat back down at the table and opened the envelope. His eyes flashed and went wide and his face showed utter shock. He didn’t pull out what he had looked at, but he did pull out a sheet of paper. He read it silently.

Dear Kurt,

I know you’ll want to refuse this, but it’s a bank check and the funds have already been withdrawn from my account. If you refuse to cash it, the money will not return to my account.

Please consider this to be my thank you for going to Ohio to put me back together, yet again. Let my current financial success put your financial world back in order from the disaster I caused. If I had listened to your sage advice, I would not have left Fanny or New York and you would not have incurred the amount of debt that you did to rescue me, yet again.

Just to be clear, this is not an effort to buy your forgiveness. I’m just trying to do what I think is right.

Rachel

Underneath, she had written her phone number this time. Kurt looked in the envelope again and looked nearly as stunned as he had the first time.

Sam asked, “What’s going on?”

“Rachel just dropped off a bank check for the amount of money I spent when I had to drop the internship and pick up those other classes. The money I’ve been repaying this entire year.”

“How did she know how much that was?” Sam asked.

“She must have gone on the NYADA website and gotten the information.”

Sebastian looked confused. “If you don’t mind me asking, how much are we talking? You’ve only
ever said that you had to pay to add the new classes.”

“A little over $6000.”

Sebastian and Sam both said, “What?”

“I told you that if you hadn’t offered to let us live here, I couldn’t figure out how I could return to NYADA this semester without living someplace very tiny with a lot of roommates, probably in New Jersey somewhere, even at that. I would have not been able to pay the card off by now and I would have not been able to take the position at the camp because I would have had to get a second job to finish paying the credit card off before school started again.”

Sam said, “That’s a ridiculous amount of money.”

“That’s why it was such a struggle in the hotel that night. I couldn’t take out another student loan that quickly, even if I could manage to get one. It was either put the tuition on my credit card or not add the classes and fall behind.”

“I didn’t realize it was that much,” Sebastian said. “With working with Isabelle and staying here, I thought you’d be able to save up to help offset your tuition expenses next fall.”

“I’ve been paying the same amount toward my credit card as I did on the rent for the loft. But I paid it off a couple of days after my birthday, so two weeks ago. I’m just shocked.”

“I am too,” Sam said.

“I think you should go to the bank and deposit it before it closes,” Sebastian said. “We’ll go with you. That’s the equivalent of cash, pretty much. If you decide you want to do something besides keep it, you can decide that later.”

“Alright. Let’s finish up and head out. We can go to the art show after we leave the bank.”

Kurt lay back on the blanket and let the music wash over him. An idea came to him while listening. Once the concert ended and the crowd dispersed, he sat up and shared his idea.

“I’m going to text Rachel and get her to tell me where Blaine lives. Hopefully, he’ll be home and we can have a chat with him.” He sent the text and flopped back again. “That was very relaxing.”

Sebastian agreed, “It was. They were very good.”

Kurt’s phone pinged with Rachel’s text giving him Blaine’s address. “Alright, let’s go.”

“What are we doing when we get there?” Sam asked.

“I’m going to ask Blaine to take down his Facebook posts about me and to stay away from me again. Let’s go.” Kurt put the address in and got directions.

Sebastian folded the blanket up, zipped the edges, clipped the strap on, and put it over his head like a messenger bag. “Lead the way.”
Chapter 25

When they got there, Kurt took a deep breath and pressed the button.

“Yeah?”

“Hey, Blaine. I need to talk to you. Can you buzz me in?”

The door release clicked. Sebastian opened the door. They all stepped inside.

Kurt led the way to Blaine’s apartment and knocked. Blaine opened the door. He didn’t move to let them in, but he didn’t shut the door because Sam stepped forward and braced his foot against it.

“How did you know where I live?”

“I texted Rachel and asked her. Will you let us in, please?”

“Sure.” Blaine stepped back.

The other three stepped just inside the apartment. The door opened into a hallway. Blaine moved down the hall just a bit so they all had room to stand. Sam closed the door after they were all inside.

“Back in early December, with Rachel and Sam as my witnesses, I asked you to stop posting things online that made it seem like we were still together. Sam asked you to stop going to the Copper Cup that he works at. I asked you to not follow me around. You have not done what I have asked. I broke up with you. There is no ‘us’. You need to stop pretending that there is. Please leave me alone. Don’t follow me. Don’t hang out at the Copper Cup. Don’t make posts that refer to me or that refer to you and me as a couple.” Kurt moved to leave and took a couple of steps toward the door. “I have been patient. Please do what I’ve asked.”

“Can I talk to you alone?”

Kurt took a deep breath. He knew he could do this. He just had to focus. “Sure”

“Sam and Sebastian can wait in here while we talk in here.” Blaine opened the door to his bedroom. “The TV is in there. Feel free to watch whatever you want.”

Sam and Sebastian nodded, went inside, and closed the door behind them.

Blaine stepped into the open living area at the end of the hall and held his hand out allowing Kurt to choose the location of their talk. Kurt scanned the room. It had a double window on the far right wall in the center, a small U shaped kitchen on the left side of the back wall, with a bar to eat at, with two barstools sitting slightly under the edge. To the right, was a single sofa that took up the rest of the back wall, leaving just enough space for the floor lamp next to it. The couch faced the wall Kurt was standing next to, which was the wall between the living area and the bedroom. Along it was a large desk with a bookcase to its right. The shorter wall with the window had nothing in front of it. The stools and the sofa were his only seating options. Kurt sat on the far end of the sofa, near the floor lamp. Blaine followed him and sat on the end next to the bar. Kurt turned and slid back toward the arm of the couch, and pulled his right ankle up onto his knee so that he could turn and face Blaine.

“I’m not sure why you’re trying to maintain this image that we’re together, but it’s not going to
sway me. What do you want to talk about?”

Blaine scooted back into the corner of the couch and pulled his left leg up, sitting half criss-cross, his right foot still on the floor. He looked Kurt in the eyes and spoke sincerely, “I love you, Kurt. I want to know what I can do to prove that to you. I don’t want us to be broken up. I get that we went too fast last fall. I’m willing to start back at the beginning. We can go on dates. We won’t move in together right away. I’ll do whatever it takes.”

“Blaine, please listen. My answer is ‘no’. I am asking you to respect my wishes. We aren’t getting back together now or in the future.”

“I don’t understand. You went back to Lima for me. You told me that you loved me still. You sat there at the bar in Scandals and told me that you had come back to get my forgiveness and win me back. And you did that, the forgiveness part. You didn’t have to win my heart back. I never stopped loving you.”

Kurt focused his thoughts. “I know I said those things. And I meant them. But I was in a bad place and I was blinded by my absolute loneliness. With everyone gone, I was so alone here. You came right after graduation and you didn’t want me to be friends with any of the guys at school. With all the hours I worked, the extra schoolwork to get caught up, and trying to be there for you so you wouldn’t feel neglected, I didn’t have time to make any new friends anyway. But once all of you left, I was here alone. But you weren’t alone. You were with Dave. But then you cheated on him, kissed me, and suddenly we were back together. And then three days later we were married. That was just absolute madness.”

“I didn’t love him like I love you.”

“But that’s not how he saw it. For him it was a natural progression from however you started out at Scandals to a committed relationship where the two of you were living together sharing a bed. If you didn’t love him the way you loved me, then perhaps you shouldn’t have been living with him and giving him the impression that you did. You lived with him longer than the two of us made it, and he seemed happy, really happy. He was proud of being in a long-term relationship with you. He looked like he was on cloud nine at Homecoming. He finally had someone who loved him and he was smiling the whole night.”

“I needed someone. I was lonely too.”

“I understand that, and I know that Sue was interfering and I don’t really know why. She never came across as overly interested in our relationship when the two of us were there my senior year. Forcing us to spend all that time together in that fake elevator and forcing us to kiss to get out was insane. And I’m not denying that I enjoyed kissing you. And I’m not saying that I don’t find you attractive. I always have. I think getting away from everyone at McKinley and Dalton has been good for you – you seem more relaxed. Last fall in Lima, you had gotten even more outrageous with your clothing. You were wearing plaid shirts with completely uncoordinated, oversized plaid ties – much worse than my attention attracting clothing my sophomore year. Now, you look like a 21 year old college student, not someone’s grandpa whose vision is too bad to realize that not a single thing he has on goes together.”

“Wow, you’ve never insulted me like that.”

“Look at photos of yourself. I don’t know what you were trying to say besides ‘look at me’. You rock the 50’s dapper gentleman look. You always have. But last fall, you just went overboard. I like this softer look you have now. You look more approachable, more relaxed. I always wanted to see how you’d look if you let your hair do its thing.” He tried to reign in the compliments, but
Blaine looked really hot. “I think this is probably your sexiest look ever. Jeans that are long enough and the fitted henley with your sleeves pushed up.” He nodded very slightly. “You look good. Really good. The soft, loose curls and the 2-day stubble...” Kurt looked away and pressed his lips together while taking a deep breath.

Blaine blushed slightly. “Back in Ohio, I had this role, like you said, the dapper gentleman. Everyone at Dalton saw me that way. When I transferred to McKinley, I kept that look. My senior year, I gave up the bowties and went to wearing Levis a lot of the time. I kept those even though I didn’t bring them with me to New York the first time.”

“Well, this new look seems to suit you. You seem more relaxed.”

“NYU is a better fit for me. There are a lot more students and I don’t feel like I’m being watched all the time, if that makes sense.”

“It does. NYADA is small and everyone knows everyone’s business. NYU would allow both anonymity and the ability to shine within a particular class or performance.”

“I don’t understand any of what’s going on. We got back together, you walked down the aisle with me and seemed happy, and then we were in separate hotel rooms. When I finally thought we’d be heading to the courthouse, you just left and suddenly you were nowhere to be found.”

“I didn’t have anything to say then. I had to figure things out. When we sat at that restaurant the night I called off the engagement, you asked me what had changed. I didn’t have the answer to that then. But I do now. I had changed. And you hadn’t. And then after everyone left and we broke up, I was completely alone. I didn’t even really have my dad to turn to. He was busy with his congressional duties. Rachel was completely out of reach. Everyone had moved away and I was still here alone.”

“Which is pretty much how I’ve been since Rachel moved out and the semester started back in January.”

“I know, but you’ve been making friends. You talk to the guys at NYADA. You bring guys with you to the Copper Cup.”

“Please help me understand. I really don’t understand what’s going on. You just said that you’re the one who changed and I didn’t. What does that even mean?”

“It means that I’m not okay with being your sidekick. When we got in that argument after you came at me in combat class, you admitted to not liking the feeling that I didn’t need you to protect me. You didn’t like it that other guys found me attractive. When I was talking to them that day, I saw you sitting across the room stress eating. I don’t know how you managed to not get kicked out of the classroom for eating in class. Anyway, you said you were afraid that I would wake up one day and realize that I didn’t love you anymore.”

“And you said that you’d always love me.”

“And I do, but I can’t be with you. Just like you said you had this role of dapper gentlemen, all of you pushed me into the role of the doting supportive parent – or in your particular case, doting supportive lover. I made sure the bills were paid, with no help from you or anyone besides Rachel’s dads. I made sure there was food in the apartment, even when I was paying to feed other people. I bent over backwards accommodating everyone. I was pulled into the mediator role just like in Glee. I was expected to help everyone work everything out and then step back into the shadows while everyone else got to shine. My senior year at Nationals, I wasn’t even chosen to
sing back up for Rachel’s solo. Sorry, wrong topic.” He readjusted himself on the sofa and got more comfortable. “I worked two jobs, went to school more than full time, and had to play mediator between Santana and Rachel. The arguing was epic. The stress was insane. Neither one of them cared about me – except getting me on their side of an argument. When you came, then I had to make time for you.”

“You make it sound like that was a chore.”

“I had to work hard to let you back into my life. When you agreed to play Tony, you bruised my trust. You may not have ever promised that you wouldn’t accept Tony if it was offered, but you said it should go to a senior and you also didn’t list it on your audition form, but I was there. I saw you have the opportunity to stick to your word and turn the role down. If you hadn’t known you were doing something you shouldn’t do, you would have responded differently when asked. You hesitated – a lot. Then you hemmed and hawed and went ahead and read for Tony. You knew I needed it, but you wanted it. I was supportive – so much so that I managed to singlehandedly procure the funding for the show. I could have been supportive, but then let the show die without funding. Mercedes was better than Rachel. I could have been vindictive and not gone out and found the funding for the show. I did the artwork. I did everything I could to make that show a success. And a few weeks later, in the car that night you broke my already bruised trust. I had never fully trusted anyone since my mother died. And I gave you myself the next night to prove my love to you despite how much you had hurt me the night before. Besides my dad, you were the only person I had truly allowed myself to trust and it wasn’t because you had earned my trust because you hadn’t. I chose to open up for the first time and I offered my trust to you freely.”

“I know I messed up when you first came here and I was at McKinley. I was stupid. I missed you so much and I thought I could replace you. I couldn’t and I can’t. You forgave me and we got back together.”

“I’m not sure that I forgave you.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that everyone was on your side. You got nearly a hundred people and my dad to back your proposal. Remember that you told me that it was my fault that you had cheated. First you told me it was because you needed me and I wasn’t there and then you told me it was because you thought I had moved on and you were out of the picture. I accepted the blame you put on me. Everyone around me was just waiting for me to take you back, like I was the one in the wrong. I just went along with it. You knew I couldn’t say ‘no’ in front of a hundred people. Me going back to you was the inevitable ending in everyone’s eyes, even my own.”

“So, you didn’t want to be engaged?”

“I wanted to date Adam.”

“You said there was no story.”

“There wasn’t. People at NYADA and the Apples liked the idea of us as a couple, but we never actually dated. We spent time together and did date-like things together. Coffee, lunch, and he came over to the loft and watched movies with us. Study dates. There was nothing beyond hugging, sitting close, some hand holding, but he’s a physically demonstrative guy, a lot like Sam. I wanted to be over you. I wanted to give into the desire I had to break free.”

“We spent Christmas together and you slept with me at the wedding-that-wasn’t.”
“You coming at Christmas wasn’t a good surprise. I had just found out my dad had cancer before he sent me to pick you up at the skating rink. I wanted to spend my time with him. You being there made it really uncomfortable for me. I had never told him why we had broken up. He thought he was doing something nice for me. And the wedding—that wasn’t? Santana and Quinn hooked up. Finn and Rachel hooked up. Being close to you and singing with you and dancing with you broke my willpower to stay away from you. I was slightly drunk and horny and I hadn’t kissed anyone since the night you told me you had cheated on me. I hadn’t had sex in five months. I thought it would be amazing, but what I found was that having sex with you still felt great, but it felt empty. And that never changed.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that I meant what I said when I left, that it was fun. It felt great, but it wasn’t like it had been before. You cheating on me broke that bond I had with you. Sex became a physical act, not something that made me feel emotionally connected to you.”

“So you didn’t love me anymore? I don’t understand.”

“I did love you. God, I loved you more than I loved myself. When you cheated on me, I hurt so much I literally thought I might die. When Finn left that morning, he asked me how I was and I told him that I felt like I was dying. And when I met Adam, he was like a ray of sunshine. He brought light back into my dark, dark world. You had torn my heart out. I stopped sleeping. I survived on Ambien. Adam didn’t pressure me. He just befriended me. He was actually the first person in my life to seek me out to spend time with me. Every other person I was friends with I sought out myself or they were just people in Glee that I eventually became friendly with.”

“So, at the wedding, you were playing with me?”

“I told you up front that I wasn’t getting back together with you. You’re the one who said it was just ‘bros helping bros’.”

“I did say that, but it wasn’t the truth.”

“I know. And I wasn’t toying with you. I was torn. After we sang together and slow danced, it felt like maybe things could be the way they were before you broke my heart. And we had sex and I found out that it wasn’t like it had been before.”

“So, you wanted to be over me.”

“I did. When having sex with you felt like having sex and not like making love, I felt like that was my sign that things were irreparably broken. It had been over four months since you had cheated on me and we had broken up. I tried to move on when I got back here after we hooked up. I continued to spend time with Adam. He wanted more. I hadn’t healed. He was patient and didn’t push. But after we hooked up after the reception, everyone who knew us took that for a sign that a reunion was imminent. Santana actually told Adam. Everyone was on your side and behaved as if it were just a matter of time before I got over myself and went back to my soulmate.”

“So, when you were back here in New York after that, you wanted to move on?”

“I did. A month later when I went back for my dad’s oncology appointment, my intention had been to tell you that I was going to ask Adam out on a real date. I was going to tell you that I was going to move into my own place and that you could live in the loft with the girls if you wanted.”

“But you prepared a song.”
“I know. That happened after I had been in Ohio for the week. I told you that I’m not faultless in this. We were both 19. We kept circling each other. You had been my best friend for over two years. I missed you. I gave you an inch, you saw it as a mile. You went from ‘Kurt’s giving me another chance to be a part of his life.’ to ‘Let’s get engaged.’ in like 24 hours. And when my dad saw my apprehension on the way to the surprise engagement, and instead of reaffirming me and my autonomy, he gave me a pep talk about wishing he had gotten more time with my mom. Even my dad saw us being married as endgame. It didn’t seem to matter to anyone how much you had hurt me. I was obviously being a ridiculous drama queen and I needed to get over myself and realize that we belonged together and that whatever you did was irrelevant because you should be my focus in life. My role was to be by your side to support you and your dreams.”

“I never meant for you to feel like that.”

“Maybe not, but never wearing a ring and making sure that I didn’t have any male friends sure put you in the 50’s husband role. My place was by your side as your supportive 50’s wife. You managed to get into my second-year classes. I couldn’t even be allowed to attend classes without you chaperoning me. You watched me when the guys in combat class would talk to me. You admitted you liked it when I was emotionally distraught and afraid when I came to Dalton. You said you loved the feeling of being able to protect me and take care of me.”

“I do.”

“Blaine, please listen to me carefully right now. You saw how upset I was by what Dave had done to me, right?”

“Yeah.”

“What you did that night in the Scandals parking lot upset me a LOT more than anything Dave had ever done.”

“How is that possible?”

“You obviously don’t remember that night very clearly. You pulled me in and held me against my will while I struggled to get free. You kept trying to kiss me and you were holding me by my arms and my neck while I was trying to get free while trying to get you to keep your hands to yourself. You told me my bucket list idea of a meadow full of lilac didn’t matter and that you wanted me and so we should have sex in the backseat right then. We had never more than barely made out, not even really heavy French kissing. And you were pulling on me and grabbing me while I told you ‘no’ repeatedly and loudly. And you ignored my pleas to stop. That upset me more than what Dave did because I had NEVER trusted him at all and I trusted you and you violated that trust.”

“Why didn’t you say something the next day?”

“I was waiting for you to apologize. I got in the car and followed you and got you to get in. I drove you home, and then I called a cab. You never even asked how I got home. You drove your car there, remember?”

“I didn’t even think about it. I woke up with a killer headache. I turned my whole focus on getting over my hangover and being able to perform that night. When you came to me and you weren’t angry, I figured that everything was okay. Wait, you said you followed me to get me in the car?”

“When I finally got loose and got out of the car, you walked off in a huff and said, ‘I’m sorry if I’m trying to be spontaneous and fun.’ And then you huffed off across the parking lot, saying you were going to walk home.”
“From Scandals? I didn’t live within a reasonable walking distance of Scandals.”

“I know. That’s why I followed you and got you to get in your car.”

“Why weren’t you angry with me the next day? Why did you go back to my place and make love to me that night?”

“Because I chalked you getting drunk up to being my fault. I should have made sure you didn’t end up with more than one beer. I knew you couldn’t hold your liquor. The previous time I had seen you drunk you had your tongue in Rachel’s mouth kissing her more passionately than you had kissed me up to that point.”

“Oh, God. That was a disaster. Don’t remind me. So, you blamed yourself, but that still doesn’t really explain why you took the initiative the next day.”

“I was afraid you’d leave me for Sebastian who was making it quite clear that he was willing to give you what I hadn’t. But honestly, if I had known about the pact you had made with Rachel at that point, I probably would have broken up with you after what happened in the parking lot.”

“You know about that?”

“I found out that winter break. Finn was asking me about different types of condoms. I didn’t even know that they had been having sex. Anyway, I found out about it then. I was hurt, but again I felt like I had been the one holding out on you and you were bound to get sick of waiting at some point, but yeah it stung. But by then you and I were having sex as often as we could given the fact that we didn’t live together. And we were giving each other hand jobs and making out when we couldn’t have sex. And for once, I was feeling pretty secure in our relationship. I was unaware that you were still texting with Sebastian and hanging out with him at Dalton and Scandals without me.”

Blaine looked away.

“Yeah, I know about that too. I told you that after I left the hotel in Indiana that I went to try to figure myself out. Why would I agree to marry you when you had just cheated on Dave and broken up with him a few days before that? I told you I compiled a lot of information. It started then, but it’s grown over time. I’ve been writing everything down and organizing it. It helps to see what happened in an organized outline. I fell head over heels for you. I loved you with everything I had. I gave you everything I was. But it was never enough. I let you shine even when it was my turn. I wasn’t controlling or vindictive. But when Chandler sent me stupid flirty texts for three days, you flipped out. And in your anger you admitted that you had lied when you said you came to McKinley for yourself when you yelled at me that you had switched schools for me after you saw the texts. You publicly humiliated me in front of the only people I had ever considered my friends. I didn’t cheat on you and you know that.”

“You’re right. Those texts were ridiculous, but the flirtiness in them was evident. And you liked it and I hated that. All I could see was you being in New York and finding someone new.”

“And that became your downfall. I trusted you and you didn’t trust me. You didn’t trust me enough to knew that I loved you with everything I had and I would NEVER have cheated on you. I haven’t even managed to ever date anyone besides you in the four years and eight months that we’ve known each other. Adam and Walter don’t count because there was only friendship with both of them. How many other people have you had sex with? Eli and Dave…”

“Do you really want me to answer that?”
“I want you to think about the answer. What does that answer say to you? I was fully committed to you before you ever even gave me a chance. I was your third choice and I feel like maybe even then you only chose me then because I was available and you already knew how I felt about you. I was a sure thing.”

“The two of us got into so many stupid fights after I moved back into the loft. We said things we didn’t mean. I went back to Ohio. I never quit loving you.”

“Your assumption is that I will get back together with you this time. I can see why you would think that because I’ve got back to you every time you’ve hurt me. Back when you first told me that you loved me, I was convinced that you meant it. But people who love each other don’t do the things to each other that you’ve done to me. I was desperate to be loved. I’m not claiming to be a saint. But cheating on someone and blaming them for it is pretty low.”

“I still love you.”

“I know you think so. I know that you loved my utter devotion. From the very beginning, you saw that I would stick around. I’m still not sure that you’ve ever found me physically attractive. I know that you found my utter devotion attractive though. You loved that I loved you. You pretty much ignored my last question. What does it tell you that you don’t want to answer my question about how many guys you’ve slept with?”

“I don’t know.”

“To me it feels like you want a clean slate. You were like this about Eli. You would never talk about it. You would just say that it was in the past and it should stay there. I wanted to talk about it because you blamed me. I accepted the blame, but I never could figure out what I had done wrong. We had spoken on the phone at lunchtime the same day that you showed up in New York in the evening. I had taken your call at work again. Despite being told not to make or take personal calls while I was working, which I was, even though it was your lunch break at school - we talked. You said you missed fooling around with me. I told you I did too. That was it. You never said that you were so horny that masturbating wasn’t cutting it anymore. You didn’t say that you had bought a dildo or any other sex toy to try to relieve your sexual frustration of me not being there to make love to you whenever you wanted me to. You were frustrated because I couldn’t answer every time you called me. I was the one that had called you that day. I wasn’t ignoring you. Yes, I had to let your calls go to voicemail when I was at work and you called my cell phone, but I returned those calls. But then you showed up in New York at 9:00 that night. You had to have gone out and let Eli fuck you that afternoon after we talked, and then what? You had a sudden epiphany that no-strings sex wasn’t what you wanted and you came running to me? You weren’t even going to tell me until I basically dragged it out of you. You came here wanting me to make love to you that night.”

“When you make love to me, you make me feel like I’m everything. You know every place to touch me. You know how to make me fall apart and put me back together again. It’s not just sex. When you said what you said about us at the wedding-that wasn’t – that sex feels good. I knew what you meant. That’s how I feel when I have sex with someone besides you. I don’t want to talk about those other times and the other guys because they don’t mean anything to me. What I did with them felt good, but it’s not like when we’re together.”

“We’ve known each other for four years and eight months. In that time period, we started dating about 4.5 months after we met. We were together for about 19 months, then apart for a little over 5. Back together for 14 months, and apart for 13 months, minus the 3 days last fall. What you did during the first 5 months we were broken up and the last 13 months that we’ve been apart is none of my business whatsoever. I’m asking you whether you were with anyone besides me during the
14 months that we were together, mostly here in New York.”

When Blaine didn’t answer right away, Kurt spoke again, “You know what? Never mind. I’ll just go to the free clinic and get tested again.”

Blaine ignored the previous topic. “In the entirety of this conversation, you haven’t said that you don’t love me anymore. Since I still love you, why is it out of the question for us to get back together?”

“There are no more chances for the two of us. They’ve all been used up. There will never be an ‘us’ again.”

“So, that’s it? The fact that I love you means nothing to you?”

“Honestly, what it means to me is that you don’t understand the meaning of the word ‘love’. People who love each other don’t lie to their partner, steal from their partner, or cheat on their partner.”

“That’s harsh. I know I made mistakes, but wow…”

“A mistake is when you buy chocolate chip ice cream instead of mint chocolate chip ice cream because you read the label too fast. It’s not a mistake to let someone else fuck you. That was a choice you made to cheat on me. You chose to break my trust. It wasn’t a mistake to accept Tony. That was a choice to steal the part from me since I was the only one auditioning for the role. It wasn’t a mistake to tell me that I was going to be in the showcase. That was a choice you made to lie to me. You refusing to wear an engagement ring was a choice to show the world that I was the subservient one in our relationship. You were the one that needed a reminder to keep your pants on, not me.”

“You’re not acting like yourself.”

“Actually, this is the new, improved me. I stick to my much-deliberated and well-thought-out decisions. And I don’t kowtow to someone else’s vision of how I need to live my life. Last fall at Rachel’s party when you kissed me before you left, you cheated on Dave. You had been living with Dave, sharing a bed and an apartment for longer than we had managed to live together. I’m not sure if any of that meant anything to you, but I’m sure it did to Dave. You let him think that you loved him. You’ve been in long-term relationships with two people and you’ve cheated on both of them. You won’t answer about whether you cheated on me with anyone besides Eli, so I don’t feel confident that the answer is no.”

Kurt got up and started pacing slowly in front of the window for a couple of minutes before he stopped and looked outside. He turned back to Blaine and continued speaking.

“I can’t be in a relationship with a man who was in a relationship with someone for months, who lived with someone like he was in love with that person, who cheated on that man, and then suddenly wanted to marry the person he had cheated on before. I’m not going to be your 50’s wife who turns a blind eye to your constant philandering. I deserve better. You think I’m not acting like myself. That’s because I’ve learned to stand up for myself. This is me saying ‘no’, which you’re not accustomed from hearing from me.”

“Well, that’s true. I think the last thing you said ‘no’ to me about was my idea of an office in the loft. But then you created the very office space I had envisioned when I moved back into the loft.”

“An excellent example of my point exactly. I backed down. I didn’t want an office in that space. I
liked that space being open. It allowed us to have a multi-purpose area, but I had lost my band and
saw no hope of getting it back and very little reason to need a multi-purpose space anymore and I
wanted you to be happy, so I gave up what I wanted to give you what would make you happy, as
usual.”

Blaine nodded. “You were so happy to see me and you looked so proud, I thought you had actually
decided that my idea was a good one. You hiding how you felt didn’t help any of this.”

“I’m aware of that. I’ve said more than once that I wasn’t faultless in all of this. A little over seven
months ago, I made the wrong choice by getting back together with you. I learned a lot of things
the next day, and I left to re-evaluate my choice before making it permanent. Once I was away
from the Klaine Fan Club, I gathered information and I was able to piece things together. This
relationship was actually over the day you showed up and told me that you had been with someone
else. It hasn’t been the same since. You expected me to be supportive and understanding and put
you first all the time. But despite the fact that I went back to you and that I loved you, you didn’t
rebuild the trust you had broken. I should have never gone back to you the first time. I admit that I
am at fault for making choices based on faulty reasoning. Believing that our break up was my fault
was based on faulty reasoning. Ask any adult. The person being cheated on is never at fault
because the person who willingly cheated had the opportunity to break up before they went
through with being with someone else. All you had to do was call or even text me when you were
standing in front of Eli’s door and say that you couldn’t deal with the distance and that you wanted
to break up. I’ve struggled with it a lot. I’ve often wondered if you did it to punish me.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, I was unhappy about not getting into NYADA and being in Lima for another school year
because I hadn’t applied anywhere else, which was stupid. But you were the one that said it was
killing me to stay and you pushed me to go. So, I did. Did you think I would get here and realize
that it was too much and come back to Lima? Be honest. I deserve the truth.”

“Actually, I figured that you would use up the money you had before you could find a job and a
place to live. You didn’t have that much and I thought you’d be ready to head back to Lima within
a few weeks, but then you found the loft and got the internship and you were so happy about
everything. I felt like I had fallen from the center of your world to somewhere barely on the
periphery just waiting to fall off your radar completely. I imagined this future in which our
relationship was doomed. I imagined you working at Vogue.com, meeting models, spending time
with Rachel and any new friends that she made, and finding someone else. I went to Eli’s that
afternoon and learned that sex felt great, but that you making love to me was something completely
different. The minute it was over, I got dressed, and left his apartment. I booked a flight from my
car before I even headed home to shower. I rushed get to the airport. I got to New York that night
and you were thrilled to see me. You immediately welcomed me into your New York life. You
took me to Callbacks and encouraged me to sing. I sat down on that piano bench and realized that I
had been wrong about everything.”

“So you sang the song I most associated with you, and then you blamed me. In a purely
manipulative move, it seems.”

“I was so lonely without you, and after I got here I realized that I hadn’t already lost you. I needed
to keep it that way.”

“So, you set out to punish me for being happy without you by showing me that you could get what
I gave you from anyone else, but ended up finding out that having sex with someone else didn’t
provide you with what I did, and then flew here to New York so I could provide you with what you
“Really needed? And when I asked you why you were acting so weird, you tried manipulate me into staying with you by making me feel guilty that you had felt neglected in the two weeks I had been here to the point where you sought someone else out to fuck you?”

“When you put it that way, it sounds really messed up, but nothing you said is inaccurate.”

Neither one of them realized that Sam and Sebastian had opened the door and were standing against the wall in the hallway.

“Ri’s why there will never be an ‘us’ again. You willingly went to Eli to let him fuck you, but then found out that he couldn’t satisfy you the way I did. Then you came here and convinced me that it was my fault that you went to someone else. Everyone sided with you that I was in the wrong not to forgive you and take you back. You manipulated me into saying ‘yes’ in an over-the-top public proposal. And for the 12 months you lived here in New York the first time, I lived with the constant fear that if I didn’t have sex with you every time you wanted me to that it would be my fault if you turned to someone else who would be more than willing to do it. You were the desired one. Everyone made sure that I knew that. You lashed out at me when other guys talked to me in class when I got out of the hospital. Rather than being glad that other people cared that I was alright, you didn’t trust me not to turn my attention towards someone other than you. You didn’t trust me. No matter what our other issues are, that is the one reason why I can’t be with you. You don’t trust me despite the fact that I have NEVER done anything to give you any indication that I would cheat on you. You cheated on me, lied to me, and manipulated me. No matter how much you love me, I don’t trust you.”

He walked across the room, turned, and saw that Sam and Sebastian were leaning against the hallway wall.

“I’m ready to go.”

He walked back into the open living area, with the other two following behind.

“The possibility of a relationship between the two of us no longer exists. That’s not going to change. There is nothing you can do to regain my trust.” He stepped towards the door. “I have come to the conclusion that I made the right choice to end our relationship, which was riddled with deceit and dishonesty on your part, and fear on mine. I can’t go back to living wondering whether you will run to someone else to fuck you any time I don’t want to have sex or if I am too tired or we aren’t in the same town. I can’t go back to living wondering if you’re lying to me or manipulating me. I can’t go back to living on edge all the time. Your behavior doesn’t fit the criteria for how I want the man who says he loves me to treat me. And I’m willing to wait however long it takes to be with a man who treats me as his equal and who has my best interest on the same line as his best interest because it’s OUR best interest.”

“But you trust Sebastian, who tried to blind you and who caused me to need surgery?”

“I had never extended any trust whatsoever to Sebastian back then. He was nowhere near being on the list of people I trusted even a little bit. And for your information, in case you haven’t noticed, you’re shorter than me by a few inches and you dove in front of me, which was a reckless, yet gallant move. I was far enough back from Sebastian that my pants and the lower part of my vest and shirt would have gotten slushie on them. He didn’t throw it anywhere near high enough to hit me in the face with it. He was staring straight at me before he threw it from barely more than waist high. And he’s taller than me. Your face intercepted his anticipated trajectory.”

“Whatever you want to believe,” Blaine said.
“I’ve been hit with innumerable slushies. I’m a pretty good estimator of where they’re going to hit. And as you learned that day from getting your first slushie facial, you never keep your eyes open, and you turn if at all possible. Closing your eyes becomes a reflex after the first one.”

“That doesn’t explain why you trust him.”

“I don’t have to explain my actions, but I will answer. He extended an olive branch back at Sectionals my senior year. He turned over a new leaf. I never saw him veer off the straight and narrow after that. That doesn’t mean he turned into an angel, but he never did anything to me after that. And he apologized to me personally for the things he did to me. I apologized to him for the things that I had said. He accepted my apology. I forgave him and I gave him a chance. We may have had a rocky start, but he grew up in the three years between when we met back in Ohio and when we met again here in New York last fall. He’s been honest and his actions and words have earned my trust. And that combination gained him my friendship, which I value greatly. He’s one of my best friends now.”

Blaine scoffed. “Steroid use and cheating ring a bell?”

“He was still at Dalton when you asked him to help you with the proposal, wasn’t he? What does that tell you about his alleged drug use? I’ll answer. He didn’t take any steroids. Neither did the other 10 or so Warblers that were still at the school. You went to Dalton. You know the rules. If he and those other Warblers had tested positive for drugs, they would have been expelled like Hunter and the others.”

“Sam, we were best bros. Why did you kidnap us and break us up? I can’t figure out how Kurt got you in the break up. I mean I know that people aren’t possessions, but I can’t figure it out.”

“Kurt was my best friend – my only close friend at McKinley. He helped my family through living in that run down motel. He never once made me feel like a charity case. He wasn’t there when I auditioned for the Glee guys because in a not-so-shocking move, they hadn’t included Kurt in the group. He didn’t hear me say that I was dyslexic. By the time we met, Karofsky was going after him with a vengeance, and he did everything he could to stay as far away from me as possible to keep me from being targeted as well. When he came back to McKinley, he started helping me with my brother and sister, he saw me struggling with my schoolwork and he started tutoring me as well, but he never treated me like I was stupid. He was kind and patient. He was a huge help. Since I was spending so much time working and watching my brother and sister, I was barely passing by that point in the semester. He singlehandedly kept me from flunking that semester. You left for Six Flags not long after Mercedes and I saw the two of you at the Lima Bean. Kurt and I hung out that summer until my dad got the job offer in Kentucky and we moved. I hated it in Kentucky. I had basically given up in school and I was working as a stripper after quitting Dairy Queen because I couldn’t get enough hours to make enough money. I lied to him about how I was. I didn’t tell him that I was working as a stripper. I didn’t want him to think badly of me. And when Finn took me to their house to live, we sat down and talked and I told him the truth. He didn’t flinch. He didn’t slut shame me. He hugged me. He told me how much he had missed me. But when Finn and his big mouth spread around what I had been doing, you and everyone else in Glee found out. And you came at me – slut shaming me. I kept my friendly demeanor, but I didn’t trust you after that. I was polite to you because you were Kurt’s boyfriend. But that’s all you were to me – a teammate and my best friend’s boyfriend. When you cheated on him, you broke his heart. I made it my goal to keep you busy and keep you away from him pesterimg him as much as possible. And then somehow I got caught up in the nonsense. I lost my way and became your best bro and lost the person who had helped me more than anyone.”

Kurt interrupted. “He apologized sincerely. He screwed up and admitted it. He knows that my
forgiveness isn’t endless and that if he intentionally hurts me, I have no obligation to give him endless chances to keep hurting me. But he got his priorities straight and figured himself out. He’s making his own way on his own terms. No more sidekick roles for him either. The three of us are equally friends. Sam’s not our pet project or our charity case. Nor do we treat him like the class clown or jester and use him as entertainment. I know it feels like I stole your best friend, but the truth is that Sam was my best friend first. You behaved so utterly awful to him when he came back that I just kept that fact a secret from you. He lived with me for 10 months before I moved here. He and I spent a lot of time together. If you had known, you would not have been pleased. That should have been my first big clue that wouldn’t ever be comfortable with me having male friends, straight or otherwise. Anyway, that’s just another example of your lack of trust. It was fine for Sam to give you piggyback rides and hang out with you all the time doing ‘bro’ things, but I wasn’t allowed to do that. I don’t want to start another topic of conversation. I’ve made my point clear. You’re untrustworthy, dishonest, deceitful, and hypocritical in your expectations. Those are not qualities I’m looking for in a partner. It’s like the line in the song you sang to me, ‘I’d rather be alone than unhappy.’”

“So, that’s it?”

“That’s it,” his voice was calm, with an edge of absolute finality in his words. He stopped with the doorknob in his hand. “My wish for you is that you find contentment and joy within yourself.” He held the door open, letting the other two pass through the doorway. “Goodbye, Blaine.” He closed the door behind him and followed the other two outside.

As soon as the three of them were outside the building and past Blaine’s building, Sam slowed and stepped behind Kurt and grabbed him around the waist and spun him around in a circle before putting him back down.

“Sam!”

“You did it! No yelling, no crying, no going back to him. You did it!”

“I did.”

Sebastian stepped closer and pulled Kurt into a hug.

“My, my a public hug. What brought that on?” Kurt teased.

“You stood up for yourself. I’ll be honest – I was getting worried. We watched the entirety of Despicable Me, Sam’s choice of course, and you hadn’t come to get us. I was afraid that he was using his charm on you and you were getting rewhammied out there.”

“Is that why the two of you were standing in the hallway when I came to get you?”

Sam said, “We had only been there a couple of minutes when you came around the corner. But we were both relieved when we realized that he hadn’t worn you down and that you were remaining steadfast in your decision.”

“I’m definitely not changing my mind. I feel lighter. If I see him in public now, it’s not going to bother me. Even if he keeps up showing up at school next year, I’ll just be able to walk by. You know how I know for certain that I’m never going to be attracted to him again?”

“How?” Sam asked.
“He never once apologized. I gained a lot of knowledge about his motives and reasons, but despite my repeated statements of how particular actions hurt me specifically, he never once offered an apology for what happened. Not that him apologizing would have made me change my mind, but his lack of contrition means that there’s no reason to believe that he would refrain from doing the same things again and again.”

“We need to celebrate. Everyone talks about eating ice cream and watching sad movies for break ups, but I think we should eat ice cream to celebrate. Sebastian and I already watched a funny movie, but we could get ice cream on the way home and then watch *Despicable Me 2*, in preparation for the theatrical release of *Minions* next month.”

“The Minions are getting their own movie?” Sebastian asked.

“Oh, yeah!” Sam danced around and made unintelligible sounds like one of the Minions.

“Fine, your enthusiasm is contagious,” Kurt said while laughing. “Ice cream on the way home, and then *Despicable Me 2* when we get there.”

After the movie, Kurt put the finishing touches on the photo that Elliott took of him, Carole, Burt, Sam, Sebastian, and Adam at his birthday party. On the photo, he had written “Happy 22\textsuperscript{nd} to me!” at the top and at the bottom he put “Celebrating with family and friends.” The caption said, “It’s summer and I have some free time, so I’m back online. Better late than never to share a photo from my big night a couple of weeks ago – celebrating 22 years of life on planet Earth and 7 months back in the big Apple with my three best friends who arranged this amazing surprise party for me. A big thank you to all of my NYC pals that celebrated with me!” He turned toward the living room where Sebastian and Sam were rewatching a *Librarians* episode. “What do you think?”

Sam pressed pause and he and Sebastian went to look.

“That’s interesting,” Sam said. “You reactivated your Facebook page.”

“I created a new Instagram and Twitter too. I’m going to post it to all three. Rachel sent me screen shots of Blaine’s friends list. I’m going to friend request every person that he has on his friends list that I know personally, plus send requests to people I know from school, mostly the Apples. I’m not going to use any of these social media accounts to discuss anything personal. I’m going to use them for updating life events or to post information about productions that I get roles in. Just general life updates. I’m not going to post where I’m eating lunch or anything like that. I already deleted all of the old stuff off my account. Plus, I was never one to post embarrassing stuff about myself, knowing that what gets posted on social media is never private.”

Sebastian asked, “What is the point in doing this?”

“I’m ready to be me. I’m ready to be part of regular life and people use social media all the time. This time I’m in control. I’ve gone through all of my settings carefully. If people begin to bully or abuse their access to my social media pages, I’ll unfriend and block. No second chances.”

Sebastian said, “I’m sure that listing me as one of your best friends is going to get you a lot of hate really quickly.”

“Well, that will separate out who stays and who goes quickly, won’t it?” Kurt had a mischievous grin on his face and wiggled his eyebrow. “But I didn’t do it to stir up trouble. I wrote that because it’s true. And if people don’t like it, they don’t have to stick around. I don’t need 30 or even 20
close friends. I have three best friends and that is a lot more than I’ve ever had. I’m genuinely happy with how things are. I’m heading into my last year of school. I’m working within the parameters of choices I made, trying to do the best I can for myself. I can’t roll back time, but I just have to keep moving forward making the best choices I can. Today I faced Blaine alone and had zero desire to take him back, even when he sat there very convincingly said that he loved me, multiple times. I heard those words come out his mouth and my heart didn’t skip a beat, my stomach didn’t flutter with butterflies, and my mind didn’t see visions of happily ever after above his face. It’s over and he has no hold on me now.”

Sam thumped him on the back. “I’m so glad for you.”

“Me too. I’m ready to move on. I’m entering the A.B.E. era.”

Sebastian pondered and offered, “After…”

Kurt laughed. “Remember what Sam said called Blaine’s ability to charm people? The Blaine-effect?”

“After the Blaine-effect era?” Sam offered.

Kurt smiled and said, “Ding, ding, ding. We have a winner! It’s over. Saying his name doesn’t make me want to say ‘he who shall not be named’ anymore. I’m free. Really free.” Kurt began to sing.

We-ee are never, ever, ever … getting back together.

After he sang the line, Kurt added, “Like EVER.” doing his best Valley Girl impression.

Sebastian and Sam both laughed.

Sam asked, “What about you and Rachel?”

“We’ll see. I’m okay with ‘amicable-acquaintances-that-can-behave-appropriately-in-a-professional-situation’ as her role in my life right now. Anything that would have the word ‘friend’ in the description is a long way off. She can’t earn my forgiveness, but she can rebuild my ability to trust her. She left me alone like I asked. She acted in my best interest by telling me that Blaine was still posting stuff making people think we were together. She compensated me unexpectedly for something she didn’t actually owe me, but gave to me as a thank you for helping put her back together, according to what she wrote. I did stay in Ohio when she asked me to, but had she listened to me, there would have been no need for me to stay there. If I get calls from her asking me to do things outside the realm of what someone would ask an acquaintance within the next month, I’ll return her money to her. A month seems long enough to see if it’s truly a thank you as she indicated or if it’s an attempt to buy her way back into my life.”

“Seems fair,” Sam said.

Sebastian said, “I agree. So, are you going to post that photo and caption tonight?”

“I am. I called him the day I broke up with him in October. I asked him to leave me alone. He came to the City and didn’t comply with my request. We met with him in early December and I asked him specifically to not post things to the internet that referenced me in any way and to leave me alone. When he didn’t quit posting stuff online, Rachel told him to stop. When he followed me here, to NYADA, the retirement home and wherever else, that was him not doing what I asked. He’s had seven months to stop. Six months since he’s lived here. Five months since Rachel told him to stop. Three strikes and he’s out. Time’s up.”
Sam said, “Alright then. I know that Sebastian and I are going to take a hit for this, which doesn’t bother me, but I would like to know if there’s something in particular you’re planning to use as your standard ‘mind your own business’ answer about how the three of us became best friends. No one from McKinley knows that we were ever close. And everyone thinks Sebastian’s a slushie-throwing hater who caused Blaine to have surgery.”

“I’m not planning on replying to any of the haters or nosy rosies. But if either of you would like left out of this, I can use a different photo – like one of the ones of me with my dad and Carole. I can write the same thing on the photo and use the same caption and just not tag either of you.”

Sam sat down in the chair next to Kurt and said, “Now, just a minute, we’re talking apples and oranges here. I have no problem with people knowing that I’m your best friend. I just don’t want to say something problematic. I can just not respond. I’m excellent at doing nothing. It’s one of my most well-honed skills in life, if I do say so myself.” He brought his hand up and brushed his fingernails back and forth against his shirt and grinned.

Kurt laughed.

“The only people on my social media accounts are the Warblers, a couple of guys from the Dalton lacrosse team, and people I’ve needed to be in contact with about class projects that I didn’t want to give my phone number to, so I suggested creating a closed group for our project on Facebook. I might get messages from anyone you add to your friends list who was a Warbler when I was. And I think I am equally as good at ignoring people as Sam is.” He twiddled his thumbs while staring at them.

Kurt chuckled and Sebastian’s thumb twiddling. “Well, I don’t want to see that as a challenge between the two of you because I would be the one getting ignored by both of you just for you to prove your points. So, I will declare your ability to ignore people a tie with me because I think I’m the best.”

Sam and Sebastian laughed.

“So, we’re going with ignore the questions? And unfriend and block the haters?” Sam asked.

“That’s what I’m doing. You two can do whatever you want. You can make up the most absolutely convoluted, obviously ridiculous story and give that as the answer as to how we became best friends. And if you’re feeling extra creative, you can tell each person who asks a different, equally obviously untrue, crazy story.”

Sebastian said, “A creative writing challenge…”

“Maybe I’ll just use three colors of paint and create miniature abstracts and upload them as my answers,” Sam said. “That ought to confuse people enough to stop asking.”

Kurt burst out laughing. “Rorschach answers. It’s perfect.”

Kurt got up early the next morning and sorted through other photos the four of them had taken at various venues during their Saturday sightseeing trips and had them ready to upload. He had held off on his original plan to upload the birthday photo the previous night because he wanted a chance to talk to Adam before he included any photos of him.

He sent him a Skype message right after Sam left for working, thinking that he might catch Adam home still. He knew that the theater didn’t have Sunday shows, unlike Broadway shows, which
were typically dark on Mondays, not Sundays. He got a reply right away, which brought a smile to his face. He continued their conversation through messages. Kurt typed out a brief summary of his closing the Klaine portion of his life for good the day before. Adam knew which picture Kurt was referring to since it was one of his favorites from the party. He happily agreed to allow Kurt to post the photo. He had already set his Facebook account to require his permission to post anything he had been tagged in. They didn’t message back and forth for long because Adam had plans for the afternoon.

Once Kurt had Adam’s permission to post the photo, Kurt logged onto Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to see whether anyone had approved the friend requests he had sent out the previous night. He hadn’t taken the time to see how active any of the people he sent requests were. He was pleasantly surprised to see that all of the Warblers that he had reached out to had approved his request. Quite a few of the New Directions had as well.

He uploaded a bunch of photos and made a folder called “Being a Tourist in my Own City” and he uploaded shots from their road trip and called it “New England Spring Break 2015,” which was unoriginal, but accurate. Both of those folders contained scenic photos or photos that only he was in. He didn’t post any of their selfies or personal photos. Once he had finished uploading all the photos and had organized the folders, he posted the birthday party photo with the chosen caption to his wall.

Ten minutes later, he got his first response from Puck.

_ Noah Puckerman _
The next time I get leave, I’m coming to New York and you can be my tour guide. Looks fun, Hummel.

He posted a response. And got an immediate reply.

_ Kurt Hummel _
I’d be glad to. Let me know in advance. Weekends are always best. School and work keep me busy during the week.

_ Noah Puckerman _
Will do. And happy belated birthday.

Next up was the first person to get blocked and unfriended. Kurt didn’t bother to read past the first line.

_ Santana Lopez-Pierce _
So you’ve taken up with Trouty Mouth and the Criminal Chipmunk?

He moved his laptop to his bed and picked up the book he was reading. He fluffed his pillows and added Sam’s and leaned back to read, leaving his laptop on so that he could check on the three sites. A couple of hours later, he finally got hungry enough to go out to the kitchen to make himself breakfast. A few minutes later, Sebastian joined him.

“Hey.”

“Hey, yourself,” Kurt said back. “I’m taking the totally lazy route to breakfast or I’d offer to share.”

“What’s the totally lazy route to breakfast?”

“Peanut butter and jelly. Calorie dense, hitting all of the food groups, except vegetables, when
served with a glass of milk.”

“Sold.” Sebastian got to more pieces of bread out and made himself a sandwich too.

Kurt poured two glasses of milk and they sat down together. “I posted the photo from my party and I created two folders of photos – one from our sightseeing trips and the other from spring break. I didn’t include any photos that had anyone in them except me. So, they’re mostly just touristy shots of the places we’ve been. I didn’t tag the three of you in any of the photos in those two folders.”

“I’ll see what kind of responses I get, if any. Let’s share information on who send us block-worthy comments.”

“I already blocked and unfriended Santana. I figured I would have to, but I gave her a chance.”

“She’s not on my friends list.”

“I figured not. I didn’t mention that we live together.”

“If you’re concerned about my father, he’s not on my friends list. As far as I know, he doesn’t have a Facebook page.”

“No, but some of the Warblers on your friends list’s fathers may be friends with your father or business associates or whatever rich, powerful people have.”

“I hadn’t considered that. But the apartment is mine and there were no specific stipulations that I couldn’t have roommates. Just a stipulation about me not using the apartment as a way to make money, meaning that I had to live in it myself, not rent it out and live some place cheaper.”

“But by not charging us rent, you’ve circumvented the rule as well.”

“Yes. But even if I had been allowed to charge you rent for living with me, I wouldn’t have.”

“What happens after your birthday?”

“With what specifically?”

“You said that your father has been paying the associated expenses on the apartment. I’m assuming you mean any co-op or condo fees and the property taxes.”

“Yes. I will have to pay those myself this next year as far as I know. Since I was originally supposed to get my trust fund after I finished college, he would have continued to pay those fees and taxes the whole time I was in school. But with the delay in finishing high school, things won’t work out that way. The amount of money I’m getting in my trust fund will more than cover those costs. But it was those costs that I was referring to when I said I didn’t know whether to keep the apartment if I go back to France after I graduate. You mentioned renting the apartment out. I could do that, but I’d have to find a couple of people I really trust because having someone move in and damage everything could cost me more than the rent I’d charge. It can’t be a situation where I end up spending money instead of making it. If I was okay with spending money on it, I could leave it sit empty. And I’d want to be people I’m comfortable with because if I keep the apartment it would be so that I could stay in it on trips to New York. I would want my room to stay unoccupied and just rent out your room, to you if you wanted, but not to a stranger.”

“I can understand that. I know it’s a tough decision. It’s a lovely apartment and letting it go would be hard.”
He nodded in agreement. “I never really liked peanut butter and jelly sandwiches because of the texture of the bread, but following your lead and toasting it first makes a big difference. I probably won’t ever put peanut butter and jelly at the top of my favorite sandwich list, but this is much better than usual version. And it is fast, filling, and doesn’t need refrigerated.”

“You sounds like an ad for peanut butter sandwiches,” Kurt teased.

“Writing jingles and slogans does pay. Not enough to live on, but you can get hired to do it. I’m not much of a composer though, so I don’t think it’s the right career path for me. But alas, and forsooth and all those big words we both know, I seriously have no idea what I want to do.”

“Well, I know exactly what I want to do and I’m no closer to doing it than you are to doing whatever it is that you haven’t even decided on.”

“You’re already 22, haven’t you figured everything out yet?” He continued, sarcasm oozing through his dejected words. “I mean I was seriously hoping to see that turning 22 had solved all of your issues. You ditched Blaine permanently and I was inspired. Now, just one day later, you admit to not solving all of your life’s issues. Now, my hopes and dreams of waking up knowing all of the answers on my 22nd birthday next month are shot.” Sebastian put his hand over his heart and slumped in the chair.

Kurt started clapping. “And the award for best sarcastic breakfast monologue goes to Sebastian Smythe.”

Sebastian bowed while still sitting in his chair. “Thank you. I’ve been working on my sarcasm since I was a small child and it’s great to finally be honored for it after all these years. Thank you, thank you very much.” He said the last part using his best Elvis voice.

Kurt cackled. “So, belly dancing or sword play?”

“Hmm. Swords.”

“Swords it is.”

After a half-hour of sword practice, Kurt said. “I want to dance. Let’s go to NYADA and dance. We can’t tap here. The neighbors will kill us.”

“Alright, sure.”

They got their dance stuff together and left for NYADA. When they got there, they changed in the dressing room and stretched along the back of the room out of the way. The last extension class of the day was winding down. Once the students had left the room, Kurt and Sebastian pulled the barre out to where they could use it and they warmed up some more.

“You said you struggle with free form dancing. I think it’s just the anxiety of being put on the spot. Maybe you need to just choreograph a 16-count section of ballet, tap, jazz, and modern and keep them in your back pocket, so to speak. So, whenever someone points at you and says, ‘go’, you just move automatically according to whatever kind of music is being played and the style of dance that is expected of you at the moment. Those different styles of dance can be performed at different tempos, so that’s not an issue. It’s just knowing what to do on the spot.”

“That’s a good point and a good idea.”
“Most of the time, they’re not looking to see if you’re good enough to be their next choreographing protégé. They just want to see if you can keep moving and not freeze up if something happens. If you somehow end up 10 feet away from your exit point on the stage instead of 5, how will you fill that 5 extra feet of space? You can’t just walk off. What happens if the prop people take too long to clear your path off the stage? You can’t look like you have no clue what to do. They’re giving you the opportunity to have your little freak out in class so that you get used to it and don’t have a freak out on the stage during a performance.”

“That makes a lot of sense. Help me?”

“How can I refuse? I mean, you did teach me how to make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches tolerable this morning.”
The first three-week session of camp had ended the previous Friday and his one-week midsummer break had started. Since he didn’t have to work at the camp, Isabelle put Kurt to work helping her with the online coverage from the Haute Couture fashion week in Paris. He had worked 8-hour days Monday through Thursday.

After they ate dinner on Thursday, he and Sebastian finished up the food they were packing for their mini-vacation trip to Pennsylvania for the Fourth of July weekend. Once they had finished, they showered and they double-checked their bags. They hadn’t even managed to sit down to read when they heard Sam’s key in the door about 7:30.

He had a basket of fresh vegetables and fruit that he had picked up at a farmer’s stand. Kurt and Sebastian cleaned everything while Sam showered. Since they planned on getting up a 4:00 to head out, they were going to sleep as soon as Sam was ready for bed. Burt had rented a house on a lake in Shawnee State Park for two nights. Sam’s family and Burt and Carole were meeting them there.

They arrived at the state park a little after 9:00, which was before everyone else like they had planned. Sam set up to paint. Kurt and Sebastian pulled out their picnic blanket with the waterproof backing on it that they used in Central Park frequently, laid it out near where Sam had chosen to paint, and lay down to read while he painted.

Everyone else show up around 1:00, which was when they could get into the house they had rented. Sam packed his stuff up and they drove and met up with everyone. Kurt hadn’t seen Stevie or Stacey in so long, he was shocked to see how much they had grown. They were as outgoing and friendly as Sam and his parents. It didn’t take long for them to get Sam and Sebastian to give them piggyback rides, despite the fact that they were 9 and 11. Once they had finished their rides, they helped set up a badminton net they had brought with them and started playing.

Kurt helped Mary and Carole in the kitchen. Mary and Carole had met a couple of times, but it had been three years since they had seen each other and Kurt did his best to keep the conversation topics upbeat. He knew this type of event was hard on Carole. She wanted to enjoy the time with Burt and Kurt and everyone else, but seeing Kurt, Sam, and Sebastian and adding Stevie and Stacey in made her nostalgic for how things should be, but never would.

The three of them made cold-cut sandwiches for lunch and put out some bags of chips and a pack of cookies and a vegetable tray that Kurt had brought with him. Everyone came in and ate.

After they ate, they headed out to the lake that the house faced to use the pontoon boat that was tied up to the pier. For dinner they grilled out and ate outside.

Once it got dark, Sam took Stevie and Stacey outside and they lay out on the blanket and he showed them the constellations. Without light pollution, they were so much easier to see and identify. Once the kids went inside, Kurt went out and lay on the blanket and Sebastian wasn’t far behind him and Sam went through them again.

Saturday morning, Kurt and Sebastian went into the kitchen to grab some water and cereal bars to take on their hike. Sam had chosen to sleep in on his one vacation day. Carole was already in the
kitchen. They invited her to go with them. They talked and Carole and Sebastian got to know each other. They bonded over their losses and living without the most important people in their lives.

By the time they got back, everyone else was awake. They spent the rest of the day relaxing. They took the boat back out for a while and some of them went swimming. They played games, read, and sat around talking. They set off some cones and fountains Saturday evening, which everyone enjoyed.

Kurt, Sam, and Sebastian had to leave at 6:00 Sunday morning. Sam hadn’t been able to find anyone willing to work his afternoon shift, so they had to be back by noon. They let the kids sleep in, while everyone else had an early breakfast before they left. There were hugs from the parents for all three of them before they left. After spending the weekend with them, Sebastian was sure of where Sam had gotten his penchant for hugging everyone. He lingered in the hug with Carole, who had taken him in as her own after their hike.

Monday, camp started over with all new students. Kurt and Elliott continued with the roles they had during the first camp. Both of them enjoyed what they did at the camp and working together. Kurt took the new students on a tour of NYADA like he had during the first camp.

He stayed behind like he had before. He didn’t wait long before Mr. Salazar opened his office door and welcomed him inside. He sat down facing the desk as usual.

“How are things going?”

“I had a nice weekend. Sebastian, Sam, and I met up with Sam’s parents, his brother and sister, and my parents in Pennsylvania for the holiday weekend. We stayed in a house on a lake in a state park.”

“Sounds nice.”

“It was. It gave me a lot of time to think.”

“Thinking can be good.”

Kurt laughed.

“So, what did you spend so much time thinking about that you’re still thinking about what you were thinking about?”

“Guys. Dating. Specifically Adam and Sebastian.”

“Alright.”

“And I’ve been thinking a lot about that balance of power and sharing expectations and what you said about two performers trying to be in a relationship.”

“I’m pretty sure I was more specific. It wasn’t just two performers – it was two performers who would be in constant competition for roles.”

“Right, but I thought about it past that point – specifically Adam. He is a performer. He’s a really good actor and playwright. He and I would rarely compete for the same roles, but the issue of getting roles makes it very complicated. You know he’s in London because that’s where someone was willing to fund his play.”
“Yes.”

“It could move on to the West End or be picked up in Chicago or LA or even off Broadway. He will have to decide whether to continue to be in the play or let someone else take the role when it gets picked up. Or when this run is through, that could be the end and it might not get staged anywhere else and then he’ll have to decide whether to stay in England and audition for parts there or try to get another of his plays staged. Or both. Or he could come back to New York. But that’s a whole lot more complicated.”

“So, you don’t feel like you could pursue something with him.”

“Not just him in particular, but anyone in the performing arts. I was just using his current situation as a concrete example when I was thinking.”

“Okay.”

“Then I thought about trying to be in a relationship with someone who has a regular daytime job, which would be from like 8:00-5:00 or 9:00-6:00 or something. I’d have rehearsals some afternoons and then I’d be gone every evening and weekend. The only times we’d both have off would be Saturday mornings and maybe afternoons and Monday evenings and that’s it. How would that work? I know people must do it, but I’m not sure how. By the time I’d get home, he’d be asleep.”

“Is this just general anxiety or is there something specific going on?”

“It’s a lot of things. Now that I’m 100% sure that I will never go back to Blaine, I’ve been thinking about what kind of relationship I would like to be in. What kind of person am I looking for? Am I even looking?”

“Those are all valid questions and good ones to consider before you make the move of asking someone out or saying ‘yes’ when asked out.”

“I’ve also been thinking back through things, like how Adam calls me ‘love’ and ‘sweetheart’ and ‘darling’.”

“Some people just like affectionate nicknames. I’ve been called ‘honey’ lots of times when visiting southern states.”

“I could buy that except that it’s only me that he calls those names. Never Sebastian or Sam.”

“I see.”

“I was honest with him when we ran into each other when I came back here. I told him that I wasn’t able to offer him anything except friendship and even that would be on a time-limited basis because of my insane schedule. It was more like what you described as one person having all of the power and dictating all of the expectations. He willingly agreed and said it wasn’t a problem at all. And he never acted like it was, at all. He was always happy when I was available.”

“Before you get any further along, let me ask you a couple of questions.”

“Were there times when you initiated some type of social interaction and he turned you down?”

“A few times, but that was rare. There were more times when I was unavailable when he asked.”

“But he did say ‘no’ to you. He didn’t rearrange his whole schedule to make himself available
every time you asked did he?’”

“He did say ‘no’. He did rearrange his schedule a few times, but he didn’t actually leave anyone hanging. He told me a few times that he would love to do whatever it was, but that he had a prior commitment. But most of the time, he just said ‘yes’.”

“So looking back, you think he shifted the power in your friendship mostly to your side?”

“That’s what I’m wondering. And combining that with the fact that I know he was in love with me before I got back together with Blaine all those years ago…”

“You think he’s still in love with you?”

“That’s what I was thinking about. I was clear that we were just friends. He’s very touchy-feely though, like Sam. I got used to it. I reciprocated his gestures, meaning that if he took my hand, I didn’t jerk it away. Or if he wrapped his arm around my waist, I didn’t push it away. I’m afraid I led him on.”

“Did he give you some reason to believe that?”

“No, not really.”

“Are you concerned about this so much because you have feelings of more than friendship towards him or because you don’t?”

“I don’t know. I feel pretty much the same way about him as I do about Sam. There’s no conflict. We get along. I love spending time with him. He loves spending time with me. We don’t fight. There’s just this equality and affection that we share.”

“See now that contradicts what you just said. You said you felt like he gave you all the power in the relationship and then you just said that you feel equal with him.”

Kurt took a deep breath and thought for a few minutes. “Maybe it feels like he gave me too much power in the relationship because I’m not used to having any?”

“That’s possible. It could be that when the balance is equal, you feel like you have too much. Try to be unbiased. Do you really think you had all the power or maybe did he just have more free time than you, making it easier for him to say ‘yes’ than it was for you to.”

Kurt closed his eyes and tipped his head back for a minute. He rolled his neck around a few times to relax. “I think I’m most concerned that I led him on in some way.”

“Have you ever done anything with Adam that you haven’t done with Sam?”

“No, but I told you that Sam is very touchy-feely and not at all what I would consider a typical heterosexual male.”

“I get that. But you said that Adam is also like that and that he was like that before. You were also with Sam a lot of the times you were with Adam until the week Sam left and Adam stayed. If I were to guess, I would think that Adam sees you behave in those same ways with Sam and he knows for certain that you are not flirting with Sam.”

“That’s true.”

“You mentioned Sebastian was part of this thinking you were doing.”
“Yeah. He’s funny and sarcastic and witty. It’s just fun to spend time with him. He’s an amazing dancer and he’s become a really good friend since I moved back.”

“You have feelings beyond friendship for him?”

“How do I know? I should just stay single and figure myself out more, shouldn’t I? I can’t even distinguish how I feel about guys who are my friends. Maybe I’m just attracted to their decency. My first crush was a on guy who held my designer jacket when I got tossed into the dumpsters. My second crush was on Sam, who was willing to sing a duet with me in Glee Club. Those two were both straight. I knew the first guy was. I found out Sam was later. The third guy I crushed on was Blaine, whose redeeming act was taking my hand and leading me to listen to his show choir perform “Teenage Dream” while looking like he was singing directly to me and then inviting me out to coffee with two other guys afterwards instead of beating me up for spying on them. Maybe I’m crushing on Adam for just being his general nice and supportive self and maybe I’m crushing on Sebastian because he gave me a place to live, which allowed me to stay in school this year. Maybe I have no idea what it feels like to have people be nice to me and so I’m just attracted to niceness.”

“I think we jumped ahead. Let’s go back a little. We were talking about how you were concerned that Adam had given you all the power.”

“I was thinking about it and wondering if he felt that way. If Adam is willing to do anything to be with me, that’s very flattering, but it’s not very good for him, just like it wasn’t good for me, right?”

“Not necessarily. As long as you’re equally willing to do anything to be with him, then the balance of power is even. And it could be a really great relationship between two very devoted people. Some people really thrive in a relationship like that – one where they are absolutely best friends with their partner. And it’s completely reciprocated. That’s not what you had with Blaine. But it doesn’t mean that someone being willing to be that devoted to you would make your relationship lopsided like the one you were in before.”

Kurt nodded and thought for a few minutes. “I guess you’re right. I would have to be willing to take advantage of that devotion and use it to control him in order for it to make the relationship unbalanced. If we’re both nurturers, it could work.”

“As far as picking between Adam and Sebastian, is there a reason you’re thinking about it?”

“It’s not entirely about them as individuals, but also about them as types of guys. What am I looking for? Am I even looking?”

Mr. Salazar laughed. “That I can’t answer.”

“I know. But you asked why they were the topic of my thoughts.”

“So, you’ve settled things in your mind about your previous relationship and you’re trying to incorporate the things we’ve been talking about into formulating what you actually want in a new relationship.”

“That about sums it up, yes. And while Adam and Sebastian are real people that I already love, I was also thinking of their personality types as well.”

“When I asked you whether you had romantic feelings towards either of them, you weren’t able to answer. I think part of that comes from the fact that you put both of them in a ‘These men are my
friends, don’t crush on them.’ box, like you do straight guys.”

“I think I needed to in order to keep my priority of getting better and making it through the semester. I didn’t have time for them to be anything else.”

Mr. Salazar looked confused. “Your answer still somewhat stumps me. I know that being in a relationship requires commitment, but you live with Sebastian. You spend pretty much every waking moment that you aren’t required to be doing something else with him. You eat breakfast with him most days, and you eat dinner with him every evening. You go shopping and cook together every Sunday. And then you spend Sunday afternoons together. When you’re home, you’re with him most of the time that you’re not doing schoolwork or sleeping.”

“That’s true.”

“So, I’m not sure that it’s a physical time commitment that you don’t think you can keep.”

“What do you mean?”

“I think maybe it’s a mental time commitment that you are concerned about. From what you’ve told me, your last relationship required you to be mindful of Blaine in every situation, whether he was there or not. You had people reporting on your behavior. Heck, he was still spying on you all last semester by showing up randomly and watching you himself. I’m sure from what you’ve said that he gave those guys he was hanging around with the impression that the two of you were still together, giving him the ability to check on you like he did while you were dating.”

“Yeah. I guess I hadn’t thought about that in the context that you’re discussing right now. I know I’ve said that being with Blaine was a 24/7 job, but I guess I never thought about how that would or could be different in a different relationship. I’ve honestly spent so much time with snitches and gossips and Adam, Elliott, and Sebastian all know a lot of those people, and Sam knows all of them. It’s hard to move past all of that to a point where I am my own person who isn’t accountable to anyone but myself. Maybe you’re right. The time commitment response is probably based more mental time and me not being willing to commit to thinking about how everything I say or every choice I make or everything I do could be used against me somehow. I’m sure I’ve said this before, but Santana literally went through EVERYTHING in the loft looking for gossip fodder or blackmail material to use on me and Rachel. She would just walk into my bedroom area when the curtain was shut and just help herself to whatever she wanted to whether I was awake, asleep, getting dressed, not there, whatever.”

“I hope the last 8 months have shown you that the ‘friends’ you had were just bullies you let close to you. From everything you’ve told me I actually wouldn’t be surprised to find out that Blaine paid Santana to set the whole double-wedding thing up.”

“I’ve been leaning towards him paying Coach Sylvester to set it all up.”

“Either way, almost everyone in your life has ignored personal boundaries. It is absolutely reasonable for you to expect the people you live with to leave your personal stuff alone. It is normal to expect your roommates to leave your food alone or to replace exactly what they used as soon as humanly possible. Things happen. People think they have enough eggs to make the cake they need to make for something, and find they don’t and they use two from someone else’s carton, but the next time they go out they bring back a carton of eggs and replace the two they borrowed.”

Kurt snorted.
“Exactly. But since you’ve been living with Sebastian and Sam have either of them just randomly eaten things you’ve bought specifically for yourself or prepared ahead of time for yourself?”

“No.”

“That’s normal. That’s reasonable. That’s what’s to be expected amongst adults.”

“It’s different from my past experience – definitely a good different.”

“I think the time commitment that you’re trying to brace yourself for in a new relationship is all wrong. Your previous relationships were unbalanced. A balanced relationship will not leave you on edge all the time.”

“Really?”

“I think that feeling of waiting for the other shoe to drop is absolutely not a healthy feeling in a relationship. Having a boyfriend show up somewhere unexpectedly will almost always be a positive thing. The only time it wouldn’t be is if someone was trying to do something to surprise him, like buy him a gift. If he walked into a store where his boyfriend was picking out a gift for him, that would be frustrating. But pretty much every other situation I can think of, having a boyfriend show up would put a smile on the other person’s face. I know you said you were thinking of Sebastian and Adam as sort of stand-ins for guys in general, and I know Adam is in London, but pretend that he’s still in the City for this scenario. If you stepped outside the door when you leave and one of them was waiting for you in the waiting room would you feel creeped out or excited or at least pleasantly surprised?”

“Yes, of course. I mean, yes I’d be pleasantly surprised or excited. And not creeped out.”

“What does that tell you?”

“That you’re right, yet again?”

Mr. Salazar laughed.

“Is that the motivation to become a counselor? You get to have people tell you that you’re right all the time?” Kurt laughed.

Mr. Salazar rolled his eyes and shook his head, smiling. “You’ve figured it out. That was what was on the brochures for the school I went to. ‘Feel the need to be told you’re right all the time? Attend our university and you will hear those words at work every day.’”

Kurt laughed again. “Okay. So, basically everything comes down to the fact that I know exactly how people should treat each other, but my life experience keeps telling me that my expectations aren’t appropriate for me. That somehow I’m exempt from being treated respectfully.”

“Something like that.”

“I can tell you the first time I learned that.”

“When?”

“In third grade, the year I repeated, that rule about if you have a birthday party that you hand out invitations to at school, you have to invite the whole class rule…”

“I’m familiar with those.”
“So, I saw one of the kids give the teacher a stack of invitations. She went to our cubbies and put one in each of our backpacks. I got home and my invitation was gone. I saw it go in, but it wasn’t there. The next time a stack of invitations came in and got distributed, I was in the bathroom during lunch and I overheard the first boy explaining to the other boy how he had asked to go to the bathroom during class and when he walked past my backpack, he grabbed my invitation back out, and ripped it up and put it in the bathroom trash and then came back to class. That was when I learned that I wasn’t part of ‘everyone’.”

“And now?”

“And now, I’m finally starting to realize that I don’t need to change who I am. I thought I knew that in high school. I wore what I liked. I listened to the music I wanted to and I watched what I liked. I had stopped trying to be accepted long before high school. I wasn’t accepted when I tried, so I quit trying. But I still wasn’t happy. I was alone. I was alone either way. And at some point, being alone became too much. And I didn’t necessarily change that much about myself as far as my interests or likes, but I did change. I started to let myself be influenced. It wasn’t even so much peer pressure as just this desire to not be alone anymore. I let my walls down and let people closer and I let those people hurt me. I chose being hurt over being alone. I’m not sure there even was another option back then.”

“But now?”

“That’s what’s different now. Now, I have people I’ve let in and they aren’t hurting me. Now, I know what that feels like.”

“And now you don’t want to lose it. You want more though. You want that romantic connection, but you don’t want the hurt. You’ve seen that it’s possible with friendship. It’s possible with a romantic relationship as well. No one is perfect and everyone will end up doing something that bothers you or hurts you in some way, but it won’t be intentional and it won’t be to manipulate you.”

“I can accept that as theoretically true.”

“Good. Let’s take a step back again. You were saying that you don’t really know whether you’re actually interested in more, in a romantic relationship with Sebastian or Adam or anyone at this point. But let’s just talk about those two.”

“Okay.”

“Let me ask you this. Think before you answer. Here’s the scenario. The next time you call Adam, he tells you that he’s taken up with a friend of his that he knew from before he came to New York and they started dating a few weeks ago. He waited to say anything to see if anything was going to come of it, and they’re going to give it a go.”

“Okay.”

“Next scenario. You go home this evening after work, and you walk into the apartment and you find one of the guys you knew from that private school you went to sitting at the dinner table. You sit down to eat and Sebastian tells you that he and this guy have been dating the past few weeks, but he was waiting to tell you until they had decided to be exclusive.”

“Okay.”

“Do either of those scenarios bother you in anyway? You don’t have to answer now because I think
you need to think about it. But would Adam or Sebastian dating someone in a serious relationship bother you? And if so, why?”

“I’ll think about it. You think that if it bothers me, then I am actually attracted to one or the other because I would want it to be me they had asked out.”

“Well, you don’t strike me as the type that would be jealous of your close friend finding a partner. I mean if Sam told you the same thing, you’d be happy for him, right?”

“Of course. He’s still hung up on Mercedes though. But if he told me they got back together or of he told me that he had finally gotten over her and he had found a new girl, a NICE one, I would be really happy for him.”

“So, I think the same thing would hold true for your other friendships because that’s the kind of person you are.”

“I think it’s not quite a fair comparison though. I’m gay. Sebastian and Adam are gay. Sam is straight. A girl in Sam’s life doesn’t affect me the same way a guy in Sebastian or Adam’s life does. Because I am gay, their boyfriends could easily want them to stop hanging around with me. It would be more like asking the straight girl with a straight guy best friend how she would react to the guy getting a girlfriend. The fear is always that the new romantic interest will be jealous and send the best friend packing. That the romantic interest will claim ownership of all of the person’s time, pushing their best friend away – even if it’s not using words.”

“Okay.”

“So, even if I was excited for Adam, and he was here in the City, I would still be dreading the potential loss of his friendship due to him spending time with his new boyfriend and that boyfriend not wanting me to be around because Adam was in love with me at some point.”

“Alright. I see your point. But I still think you can consider the question, perhaps phrased differently. Would you be sad about Adam or Sebastian dating someone else because of the potential loss of their friendship or because they were dating someone besides you?”

“I’ll think about it. I have a question for you. How do I get over the fear of losing a friend if I ask him out on a date and he says ‘no’? How can I keep the friendship? We already talked about how I don’t just automatically feel sexual attraction and that it takes time for me to get to know someone before I feel that interest begin to peak to the point of being willing to say ‘yes’ or ask someone out. I just feel stuck. Let’s say I consider what we’ve talked about and I determine that yes, I would like to date Sebastian. If he says ‘no’ and gets uncomfortable about it, I could lose his friendship and that would break my heart. I already love him. I don’t want lose him. The same thing is true about Adam.”

“You’ve been through the opposite scenario with Adam already. He was very adult about it. He said ‘no’. He accepted it and you spent time together as friends. You repeated your ‘no’ when you reconnected and he still wanted to be your friend. I don’t think there’s one answer that can answer that question. I think some people are able to be friends with people they’re attracted to without acting on that attraction. And there are probably others who can’t do it. But I think it just depends on the two people involved. Try writing your answers in your notebook. See if you can make a list of personal traits and characteristics that are important to you as well, independent of your answers to the hypothetical questions.”

He looked up at the clock. “I’ll do that. And I’ll think about it while I walk to work.”
Have a good afternoon.”

Mr. Salazar nodded. “You too.”

Kurt stood and left the office.

Sam came into town Friday evening at dinnertime, as usual. They sat down together to eat and barely two minutes into eating, Sam couldn’t contain himself any longer.

“I met a girl.”

“Mmm hmm…” Kurt said, seeing Sam’s eyes were lit up with excitement.

“She’s a Studio Production major.”

“And that means?” Sebastian asked.

“Oh, she’s studying to work in recording studios.”

“Cool,” Kurt said.

“She’s a junior. She’s 20.”

Sebastian teased him, “Does she have a name?”

“Lexi.”

Kurt asked, “How did you meet her?”

“You know I told you about the open mic nights I’ve been going to?”

“Yes…”

“Well, she’s been there every week, but I never approached her. But last week she approached me. She asked me out and I agreed. I didn’t say anything last weekend because I wanted to see how it went first. We went out Monday evening and Wednesday and last night. Well, technically Wednesday was to the open mic night.”

Kurt laughed. “You like her.”

“I do. She’s fun. I still love Mercedes, I do, but I spent a lot of time thinking about it after I first talked to Lexi a few weeks ago. Mercedes could be on the road for the rest of her life. She might never want to settle down. I can’t just pine for her forever. I want things she just doesn’t want and sometimes that’s just how things are. I’m giving myself a new start by going to school. I’m going to give this with Lexi a chance. I don’t love her, but I could, and that’s the point. Even if she’s not the right girl for me, I’ll never know if I don’t give her a chance. I think I’ve just finally gotten to the point where I realize that I can love more than one person. I never believed in the soulmates thing where there’s just one right person for someone. I mean look at your dad. Burt married Carole and they’re really happy. But that doesn’t negate the love he had for your mom or the love Carole had for…”

“Christopher.”
“For Christopher. But recently, I’ve just realized that even though I didn’t believe in the soulmate thing, I wasn’t letting myself believe that there might be someone else out there that I could love as much as I loved Mercedes. Me falling in love with someone else doesn’t minimize the love I had for Mercedes. It just means that Mercedes and I aren’t on the same path anymore.”

Kurt nodded. “So, do we get to see Lexi? I’m assuming you have at least one picture of her.”

Sam grinned. “Of course.”

He pulled his phone out and showed them a picture of the two of them together singing on a small stage. She had shoulder length, dark wavy to slightly curly hair, medium brown skin, and dark eyes.

“She’s pretty,” Kurt said. “Is she tall or is she wearing high heels in that picture?”

“She’s tall. She might have had heels on too. I wasn’t paying attention to her shoes. Barefoot, she’s not quite as tall as you, but she’s taller than Brittany.”

After Sebastian looked at the photo, he asked, “So, she sings?”

“She does. Her voice reminds me of Santana’s.”

Sebastian looked impressed.

They continued to talk for a while.

Sam asked, “So, like a month or two from now, if things are still going well, could I bring her here for the weekend? If we stay together, I want her to meet the two of you. You’re my best friends.”

“Sure,” Sebastian said. “If you stay together, we’ll definitely want to meet her. I’ve never gotten to do the ‘grill my best friend’s girlfriend’ thing before. Could be fun,” he teased.

Sam looked at him. “Grill her?”

“Of course,” Kurt said. “We have to make sure her intentions are pure. We can’t have you settling down with a mafia princess or something.”

Sam rolled his eyes and started to laugh. “Mafia princess was the best you could come up with? She’s from a small town in Indiana. I’m sure her mafia connections come from there.”

“You can never be too sure,” Sebastian deadpanned.

Sam asked, “Have you two been watching Men in Black? Is this some sort of Agent J and K scene you two have running? Kurt’s agent J and you’re K, Sebastian?”

Sebastian started laughing. “No, but we could watch it after we eat.”

The next Saturday morning, Kurt and Sebastian headed to the subway station to get to the train station when it was just getting light outside. They got on the train and rode for two hours into Connecticut to meet up with Sam and Lexi at Silver Sands State Park to spend their sightseeing day outside of the City. Sam couldn’t wait a month like he had originally said, but he decided that a day together at the beach would be a lot less stressful if everyone didn’t hit it off.

They walked along the boardwalk and talked for a while, getting to know each other briefly. They
picked a place on the beach to sit. Lexi spread her towel out and lay down. Sebastian put his towel nearby and pulled a book out to read. Sam and Kurt took a walk along the beach.

“So?” Sam asked.

“She seems nice.”

“Nice? That’s it?”

“We’ve talked in a group for 15 minutes. She seems nice. She’s outgoing and friendly and pretty. It’s more important that YOU really like her.”

“I do, but what I want you to like her too. I’m not losing you over a girl.”

“You’re not going to lose me, Sam. Brothers, remember?”

“I know, but I blew that before. I don’t want to do it again.”

“It’s really more of whether she can accept me. Does she know you sleep with me? Is she okay with that? Does she know you hold my hand and snuggle with me? Those things are more likely to be unacceptable to your girlfriend than me knowing that you sleep with her and that you hold her hand and snuggle with her. I’m not going to be jealous. The question is will she? Will she try to pull you away and get you to give me up? The two of us continuing to be as close as we are has the potential to throw a wrench into your relationship if she’s not okay with it. I can and will accept anyone that you want to see who treats you well.”

Sam nodded. “What about you?”

“Me?”

“Why aren’t you and Sebastian dating? I was sure that you two would be together by now. I honestly thought maybe I was what was keeping the two of you apart. I thought me moving out might change that.”

“I don’t think he sees me like that.”

“I think maybe he thinks you don’t seem him like that.”

“I don’t know if I do. My counselor asked me to write out a list of qualities I’d like in my next boyfriend. I don’t even know what to put other than ‘doesn’t make me feel bad about myself,’ and ‘accepts Sam as my platonic life partner or whatever.’ Plus, he said he doesn’t want to get involved with anyone because he’s going to go back to France in a year.”

“I think that has more to do with it than how you feel about him. I think you won’t actually allow yourself to think about him that way because you don’t really see him as an option. I think you’re protecting your heart and that’s not a bad thing. It’s just sad for the two of you because I think you’d be good together. You spend like every waking minute that you’re not working or studying with him.”

“I know. Let’s head back toward them.”

“Just so you know, I didn’t tell Lexi any of the bad things that happened between us and Sebastian from high school. I decided that I need to move past high school. I didn’t actually tell her anything specific about high school. Just the general stuff. Me moving to Ohio, my parents moving away, me staying. Glee Club, but nothing specific. She knows I’ve dated other girls before, but I didn’t
tell her anything specific about any of them. I’m closing the high school book as best I can. I wouldn’t consider inviting anyone from high school other than you to my wedding, if and when I have one. People who aren’t going to be part of my life going forward don’t need an explanation for being part of my past. Maybe that sounds harsh and I’m not trying to be, but being in New York the last 8 months is like an intermission between the past and the future or this period of limbo where I was trying to pick a direction to go and I just feel like now that I’ve chosen I need to stick with it.”

“That makes sense. It really does. And it doesn’t sound harsh. Ten years from now, people like Santana and the rest of them will just be people we went to high school together with. When we quit having any interaction with them, they became like Becky, Lauren, and other people we knew but didn’t keep in contact with. I think leaving out the details is fine.”

They made their way back to where Sebastian and Lexi were. They ate the picnic that Kurt and Sebastian had packed and went wading and swimming in the ocean.

Kurt got Sebastian to wade with him.

“Sam told me that he’s intentionally not talking about specifics from high school with Lexi. He wants to move on and let the past stay in the past. He considers you his next best friend after me and he doesn’t want what happened all those years ago to cloud how people see you and the three of us as friends.”

“Oh, okay. I hadn’t thought about it, but that makes sense.”

“I want you to know I don’t even think about that anymore. It’s like that was someone else. You’re not that person. Maybe you never were. But I won’t ever bring it up again either. Adam knew a lot of stuff because Santana blabbed about everything. He was hanging around with me when the whole steroids thing came out. So, when I brought Adam around, I told him about how you fit into the craziness that was my past and how we had overcome all that, but no more. Anyone else that we meet will never know about any of that from me. When I told you it was in the past, I meant that.”

“Okay. Thanks for telling me that Sam’s not going to tell anyone. It is hard sometimes – to feel like I can ever get passed all that. Even though it’s been nearly four years since I got sent to Ohio.”

“It’s passed. It’s in the past. That’s where all of it’s going to stay. From now on, we met in high school, had mutual acquaintances because you attended the school I had gone to the year before. And we got reacquainted when my boss told me that her second cousin had a spare room in his apartment when I came back to the City. And now we’ve been roommates and friends for 8 months.”

“I like that. Absolutely true and leaves out the parts that don’t affect anyone’s life now.”

“Exactly.”

The next week Sebastian’s huge translation and analysis paper was due on Thursday in place of a final exam for his class. He spent all week working on it and perfecting it. He still ate dinner and spent time with Kurt in the evenings.

Friday was his last day as a TA for Cassie at NYADA. She changed the 2-credit class from the usual 10-week course of 3 times per week for an hour to 3 times per week for an hour and 15
minutes for 8 weeks. She also changed the 1-credit class so that it met twice a week for 50 minutes. So, Friday morning when he left NYADA Sebastian was free until classes started again the day after Labor Day.

Adam skyped with the three of them over dinner Friday night after Sam got there. Sam had already sent Adam a photo of Lexi, so he knew who Sam was talking about when they talked about their trip to the beach in Connecticut the weekend before. Adam’s show was doing well, and getting good reviews. They talked for about a half hour before Adam got too sleepy to stay up any longer.

Sam had checked out two Doctor Who DVDs and brought them with him, so Saturday night they had a return of the homemade pizza and Doctor Who marathon when Sam got off at 6:00. They watched all four episodes from the DVDs before they headed off to bed.

During the third week of Kurt’s camp, Sebastian was left with nothing to do but fret over his father’s impending arrival on Thursday – his 22nd birthday.

Kurt came back from work Wednesday evening and found Sebastian pacing through the apartment. “Bas?”

“Yeah?”

“Is there a reason you’re wearing the finish off the floor?”

“My father is in town and we’re meeting tomorrow morning.”

“I know. You told me that a while back – that you’d be meeting with him and your new financial advisor.”

“He wants to have lunch here afterwards.”

“I see. Sam has already taken a lot of his stuff with him. I have all of my storage totes. I can fold my clothes up and put them in the totes and ask to use one of the storage rooms for 24 hours. I’ll do that if it will make you feel less tense.”

“I don’t want him here. I want you here.”

“You want me here?”

Sebastian huffed. He stumbled through what he finally got out. “I didn’t mean for that to come out that way.”

“It’s alright. You’re flustered right now. What did you mean to say?”

“It’s not so much that I didn’t want to say it. I just didn’t mean to tell you like this or today.”

“You’re not really making any sense.”

“I know.”

Given Sebastian’s state of anxiety, Kurt let it drop. “So, text Isabelle and see if she can pull any strings to you get reservations somewhere posh for tomorrow, and then text him back telling him that you already made reservations wherever she can find. That way, you don’t have to have him in your space. This is your home. You don’t have to let him come here.”
“It just seems so wrong, though. He paid for this place.”

“You live here. It’s yours.”

“You’re right. I need to relax. It’s just that I understood from the rules he had given me that he
meant for me to live in the apartment alone until I finished college, but he had never specifically
forbade me from allowing anyone to live in the apartment with me for free. The rules specifically
forbade me from making money off the apartment. My father never considered the need to specify
a rule to forbid me from allowing someone to live here at no cost. I’m sure it never even crossed
his mind that I would allow someone to live here with me without profiting from it since he
doesn’t do things that don’t benefit him in some way. That’s why I’m so worked up too. Maybe the
apartment isn’t really mine. Maybe his name is on it still on the deed or whatever.”

“How about this? I’ll go pack up my clothes and stuff into my storage totes, and Sam’s too. You
can go down and get the trolley and ask to use the storage space for 24 hours. I can put the
keyboard in its travel case and slide it under the bed. I’ll take the drawers from the bathroom down
with me in the morning when I leave for camp. You can have him here or not, but if he insists and
you cave, then there won’t be anything for him to find here. Don’t worry that I am taking this
personally because I’m not. I’ve dealt with unreasonable expectations and I would rather you be
able to go to the meeting with him tomorrow without fretting so much that you end up giving away
the very thing you don’t want him to know by being so stressed out.”

“I didn’t think about a lot of things until I had too much time on my hands this week with nothing
to distract me. What if he just leased this place for four years? What if he knows already and
tomorrow I’m told that I somehow violated the agreement and he … I don’t know … makes me
move out or overrides you and Sam’s access to the building?”

“Do you really think that is a possibility?”

“I don’t know.” Sebastian dropped to his knees, crying. “I don’t know.”

Kurt knelt down and wrapped his arms around Sebastian. “It’s going to be okay. If he renigs on
everything he ever said was going to happen tomorrow, I will give you the money to fly back to
Paris. You can move in with one of your relatives and go to school in Paris next year. I realize it
will take an extra year for you to finish, but it won’t cost you much money. Sam and I will be fine.
I’ll move my stuff to Isabelle’s until the weekend, and then I’ll have Sam come pick me up. The
camp ends this week. There have to be places I can find on a train route into the City that I can
afford. If not, I’ll get a storage unit again and I’ll go stay with my dad until school starts again, and
then I’ll move into the dorms. I know Isabelle would be upset about me quitting abruptly or being
gone for a month, but she’d understand.”

“That’s not what I want to happen.”

“I know. It’s not what I want to happen either. I just need you to know that your father’s actions
tomorrow won’t just leave any of us with no options. Sam’s sublet ends with a small break between
moving out and moving into the dorms, but he can live in his truck if he has to. We’re survivors,
Sebastian. We’re tough. You’re tough. You can make it through whatever happens tomorrow.”
Kurt held him close and stroked his hair gently.

“Okay. Okay.” Sebastian’s breathing was still ragged from the crying.

Kurt started to stand and offered his hand to Sebastian and pulled up him. He hugged him again
once he was standing. Sebastian hadn’t completely quit crying, but he was calmer.
“I bet if you asked her, Isabelle would cancel any morning appointments she has and she’d go with you.”

“I know. She offered. I turned her down, but I did take her up on her offer of her lawyer going with me.” Sebastian stepped back and wiped his eyes. “Sorry for falling apart on you.”

“Sebastian, look at me.” Kurt waited for him to make eye contact. “That’s what friends do. We’re here for each other. You went with me so I could put Blaine in the past completely. You were there for me. You’ve been here for me this whole time, even when you didn’t know it. Every time I showed you some new part of me you didn’t know about and you didn’t laugh at me or make fun of me – that built me up. You help put me back together. I showed up here in pieces. You’ve watched me put myself back together and held some of the pieces in place like a vice until the glue dried when I couldn’t do it on my own.”

Sebastian nodded. He took another ragged breath. “I don’t want you to move your stuff out. I haven’t broken the rules he gave me. If he wants to try to argue that, then we can argue. But if he is going to try to pull something where he says I broke the rules, thereby forfeiting my trust fund, then he already has evidence that you’re living here. Removing your stuff will only make it look like I’ve known all along that I wasn’t allowed to have you here and that I’m trying to hide it at the last minute. If he has something planned, it’s planned. He isn’t the type to do something halfway. If he’s planning on trying to get out of giving me my trust fund money, he will have photos of you coming in and out of the building.”

“I can see that being a real possibility. So, then… I leave my stuff where it is, but I’ll make sure that everything is neat and orderly, which I’m pretty sure it already is. I’ll go to the camp tomorrow morning like usual. I can skip lunch with Elliott and come home for lunch. So if you need me, text me, and I’ll be here as soon as I can. I can leave at 12:00, which I know that you already know.”

Sebastian nodded.

“How about you pick something to watch, while I go change and then we can make dinner?”

“I’m not really hungry right now. Sorry.”

“We could dance.”

“We could.”

“Belly dancing? I think I hear the bells calling our names.” Kurt started to sway his hips as he walked towards his room to change.

After they finished dancing, they took off their bells and did yoga as their cool down. They decided to shower and put their pajamas on and then make dinner.

Kurt came out a few minutes after Sebastian. He had started an episode of Monty Python.

“I thought some ridiculousness was just what I needed.”

“Excellent choice.”

Kurt started a pot of water boiling for the rice. He made a sweet and sour sauce while Sebastian cooked the chicken. Once it was done, Kurt added it to his sauce while Sebastian cooked some
broccoli. They watched the show from the kitchen as they cooked. Less than 20 minutes later, they were sitting on the couch eating dinner and watching the end.

Once the show ended, they got up and put their plates in the dishwasher.

“Better?” Kurt asked.

“Yeah. I’ll text you once everything is over tomorrow. I haven’t decided whether to let him come here or not, but I won’t let him go through your stuff if he comes here.”

“I know. I trust you. You do know that right?”

“I’m getting there.”

“Good. I’m looking forward to Friday. You’re still coming right?”

“As far as I know.”

“I hope Isabelle doesn’t fire me for surprising her at work.”

“I doubt it. She’s still trying to figure out how to keep you from becoming a barista again.”

“I know. She’s running out of time though. I told her I had to have a workable solution by the beginning of August because I have to have time to train someone new and find a new job myself. Do you want to watch something else?”

“I think I’m going to read. You’re welcome to join me.”

“Sure.”

Just as he said he would, Kurt made sure that his room looked magazine photo shoot worthy before he left for camp Thursday morning. He also surprised Sebastian with a birthday breakfast.

“What’s all this?”

Kurt started singing. “Happy Birthday to you…” When he finished he put a candle in the middle of Sebastian’s stack of chocolate chip pancakes and lit it.

Sebastian laughed and blew the candle out. “Thanks.” He pulled the candle out and laid it on his napkin. “These look great.” He cut into the stack and put the bite in his mouth. He moaned. “Oh, God. This is good. I’ve never had chocolate chip pancakes.”

“Well, I figured as much as you like chocolate chip cookies that you’d like them.”

“Like them? Oh, no. I love these. You should definitely keep how to make them a secret or I might make them way too often.”

“I’ll do that. I’m glad you’re enjoying them. You deserve a nice birthday.” Kurt started to eat since he needed to leave soon.

They ate mostly in silence in between a few more moans from Sebastian.

“We’ll continue the nice part of your birthday when I get home from work tonight. Let me know if something comes up and you won’t be here, okay?”
“I will. I’ll text you later and let you know what happens.”

Kurt put his dishes away and grabbed his bag. “I’ll see you tonight!”

Sebastian smiled. “Okay.”

Sebastian sat at a conference table in a small office at the bank with Isabelle’s lawyer, Mr. Marshall, and her financial advisor, Ms. Allegany. His father sat across the table with a bank representative who did not introduce himself.

“This will be a short meeting as there is very little to be said,” Mr. Smythe started out. “You have violated the terms of our arrangement and I will be expecting you to vacate the apartment within 14 days so that it can be sold.”

Sebastian sat stunned for a moment.

Mr. Marshall spoke. “What agreement are you referring to Mr. Smythe?”

“The agreement that Sebastian and I had about the apartment.”

“The only agreement that I am aware of is that I was required to make good grades, which I have. I have a 4.0 GPA. I had to major in something that would prepare me for law school, which you approved of already based on the research I showed you. The other requirements were no partying, no guys, no making money on the apartment, and no job, which you modified earlier this summer. Which one of these did I violate or did you have some other requirement that I was never made aware of?”

“Partying, boys, and making money on the apartment.” Mr. Smythe slid photos across the table. “You’ve been partying with the same boys you’ve been sharing the apartment with. Some kind of kinky ménage-a-trois or whatever. And another man who frequents your place on weekends.”

“Partying is a lifestyle, not an occasional trip to a bar where I do not get drunk. I’ve been 21 for a year. And that photo was taken at a birthday celebration at which I did not get drunk.” He looked through the pictures. “This is the four of us at Coney Island. And these others are at other New York tourist attractions. I hardly see how visiting museums and theme parks makes me a partier. I’ve never been to a single dorm party or college party in two years of being here.”

Mr. Smythe said nothing.

“Boys? I haven’t much as kissed a guy since the day before I left Paris a little over four years ago. I didn’t break it off with my boyfriend until October when I realized that I would be in the Ohio for TWO years of high school rather than just a 9-month school year. I haven’t gone out with anyone here in the States. No one.”

“You frequented Scandals in Ohio. Everyone at Dalton talked about you being a Parisian manwhore.”

“Well, that’s just not true. I did go to Scandals, but just to dance and get a break from the stuffiness at Dalton. I never picked up guys there. I told you the truth. I haven’t been with anyone in any way since I’ve been in the States. I don’t have any idea how I can prove that, but it’s true.”

“How much money have you made off the apartment?”
“None. I’m not renting the room to the two of them. I let them live with me. They pay for the additional water and electricity, which is minimal. Ask Isabelle if you think I’m lying. She knows.”

“You’re letting two people freeload?”

“You told me that the apartment was mine. Is that not true? I don’t understand what’s going on here. You told me it was mine. You gave me a bank account to decorate it. You were pleased with my art acquisitions. Will you please explain to me what is going on?”

“I did purchase the apartment for you when the building went co-op a few months before you graduated, after you had gotten your acceptance to Columbia. I had it renovated using one of the available floor plans for the building. I intended to keep the apartment for the length of time that you lived in New York, which would be either four years or six years. If you didn’t get into Columbia for law school, I would sell it and pay for your housing at whatever law school you did get into. Flipping the apartment was a good investment plan. Buy low, sell high in a few years.”

“So the apartment was never actually mine? You just worded it in a way to make me think it was mine?”

“You really thought I was giving you an apartment in New York City when I expect you to join my law firm in Ohio? Why would you need to own an apartment in New York City when you’ll be living in Ohio?”

“I just took you at your statement of ‘Sebastian, I bought you an apartment in New York City.’ to mean exactly that. I wasn’t raised by people who spoke in riddles or tried to confuse people by what they said. If someone said, ‘Sebastian, I bought you this book.’ and handed it to me, I assumed it was mine to keep. I never considered that you telling me that you bought me an apartment meant anything else than that it belonged to me.”

Mr. Marshall said, “So you’re evicting Sebastian from the apartment. Does anything in the apartment belong to him? Was the money in the account he used to furnish it his? Or was that yours as well?”

“Mine, of course.”

“So you were planning to sell the apartment with the furnishings in it when my time in New York was up?”

“Of course. Furnished places show and sell well.”

“I see,” Mr. Marshall said. “What about the money from Sebastian’s trust fund? I had asked for an advanced copy of the arrangement, but never received it.”

“That’s because it’s null and void. Sebastian didn’t abide by the morality clause, thereby negating his eligibility.”

“Morality clause?” Sebastian asked.

“The partying and boys.”

“I haven’t been partying and there have been no guys.”

“You can’t prove that. I have photos of you dancing lewdly in public. I have pictures of you dancing with your whorish roommates.”
“My supposedly ‘whorish’ roommates haven’t been having sex with me or each other. Sam is straight. He only stays on the weekends now because he’s going to college, but he’s still working here on the weekends. He has a girlfriend. I have no idea if he has sex with her. I never asked since it’s none of my business. My other roommate hasn’t been seeing anyone since he’s lived with me. The fourth person you mentioned, I don’t know for sure who you’re referring to, but I already said that I haven’t been with anyone at all, in any way since I came here four years ago.”

“You expect me to believe that?”

“It’s true, whether you believe it or not. I kept up my end of the deal. I haven’t made a penny on the apartment. I haven’t been seeing anyone. I haven’t been partying. I haven’t been drunk ever since the first time I got drunk back when I was 16. I didn’t like how I felt the next day and I decided that drinking that much wasn’t worth the after effects.”

Mr. Marshall said, “Mr. Smythe, I’m new to this particular situation, but it seems to me that you’ve set this up in way that the only way Sebastian could have lived up to your morality clause was to attend class and stay home.”

“He could have gone to the museums and tourist attractions.”

“With girls?” Sebastian asked.

“Of course.”

“I see. So, if he had been dating girls and been promiscuous that would not have violated this so-called morality clause.”

“Well, if one of them had gotten pregnant, it could have.”

“This is absurd,” Mr. Marshall said. “So, you’re basically evicting Sebastian because he’s gay and has male friends instead of female friends.”

“He was to abstain from morally dubious behavior.”

“What is he supposed to do now? Are you discontinuing his payments for his schooling as well?”

“He had two years to prove that paying for his studies was a worthwhile investment, and I have determined that it is not. He is not behaving like a man of moral character or working toward the goal of finding a wife.”

“When did you ever say that my tuition payments were based on me finding a wife?”

“You knew the next step was to get into law school. Followed by the goals of graduating from law school, passing the bar exam, joining my law firm, and getting married. Continuing with your gay lifestyle is not the right direction.”

Sebastian said, “Can you excuse me for just one moment?” He didn’t wait for an answer. He stepped outside the door and texted Isabelle “Emergency!” and then dialed her number.

“Sebastian, honey, are you hurt?”

“Father is giving me nothing. He’s taking away the apartment and refusing to continue to pay my tuition because I’m gay and I’ve failed to meet his morality clause requirements. He told me no partying, no guys, no making money on the apartment, and I had to make good grades, but now he’s in there saying that I’ve violated the morality clause and he’s accusing me of sleeping with
Sam and Kurt and Adam, and maybe Elliott too. And he’s saying that going to a bar a couple of times AFTER I was 21 counts as partying.”

“I’ll be right there. Stall them somehow. Keep them talking. You’re at the bank, right?”

“Yes. In conference room 3C.”

“Got it.”

Sebastian went back in and sat down. “Can Mr. Marshall please see a copy of my trust fund paperwork? I’d like him to verify this morality clause that I have violated. And I’d like you to give us 10 minutes alone to look it over.”

Mr. Smythe seethed, but pulled out a file folder with legal paperwork in it and slid it across the table. He stood and Ms. Allegany followed him out of the room.

Sebastian said, “Read carefully. Isabelle’s on her way here now.”

Mr. Marshall nodded and began to read through the document. Ten minutes later, Mr. Smythe and Ms. Allegany returned to the room. They both sat down and allowed Mr. Marshall to continue to read. Another ten minutes passed and the door to the room swung open with a very angry Isabelle entering.

“Stephen Eustace Smythe, you are disgrace of a father.” She shut the door, not quite politely, but less angrily than she could have, given her entrance. She sat down next to Mr. Marshall. “I have spoken with Grandmother Smythe. You will be sorry you did this.”

Mr. Smythe rolled his eyes.

“Oh, you can do that all you want, but it won’t change a thing.” Isabelle’s phone rang. When she answered it she put it on speaker.

“Stephen Eustace Smythe, you are disgrace to the Smythe name. How dare you go in on what should be a happy day for Sebastian and ruin it with your nonsensical morality clause that he had no possibility of living up to since you will never consider a gay man to have the proper moral standing to inherit the Smythe legacy, but you are WRONG! While I had hoped you had grown up and had decided to be a real father to that young man, obviously you have not. I am on my way to the airport right now and I will be at the bank in two hours. That’s when this meeting will reconvene. Take me off of speaker phone and let me speak to Mr. Marshall, please.”

Isabelle picked her phone back up, turned the speaker off, and handed it to him. He got up and stepped outside the door.

“Yes, Mrs. Smythe?”

“Have a contract ready for me to sign for you to represent me when I get there. I can’t bring my personal lawyer with me on such short notice, but he will be available to consult with you.” She gave him a phone number. “He has cancelled his meetings for the next two hours, which was the best I could accomplish for today. Hopefully, it will be enough. I’m getting ready to board a plane. I’ll be there soon.”

“Yes, ma’am.” He hung up. He dialed the number he was given and asked for another small conference room to use for himself and access to a printer.
The others sat silently for a few minutes.

“I need to leave for a few minutes to see what I can do to alter my schedule for today,” Ms. Allegany said. She stood and moved towards the door.

The bank representative stood to leave as well.

Isabelle nodded. “Of course, Marissa. We’ll be right here.” She leaned back in her chair and stared across the table. After a few minutes, she reached down and pulled her laptop out of her briefcase and began working on a project.

Sebastian pulled his phone out to listen to music he had downloaded to his phone. He closed his eyes and attempted to relax. He answered texts from his grandmother on and off for the next hour. At noon, he texted Kurt that he was still in the meeting and left it at that.

Slightly more than two hours from Isabelle’s original phone call, Mrs. Smythe was wheeled into the room, with a small overnight bag and a purse in her lap.

“Thank you, dear.”

The man nodded and left the room.

Mr. Marshall came in the room just a minute later. He removed the chair next to where he had been sitting and pushed Mrs. Smythe up to the table. The bank representative and Ms. Allegany returned as well.

“Here’s how this is going to go Stephen. You will sell me the apartment today. You will transfer the money for Sebastian to finish out his education at Columbia to an account that only he can access today.”

“I will not.”

“You will. You want to play the ‘morality clause’ game with me? Your grandfather may have been the lawyer, but I am an educated woman not to be trifled with. I am 87 years old and I will NOT see you treat your only child like this. His sexual orientation has nothing to do with him being an upright or moral person. YOU are the one with a morality problem. I’ve gotten details of how you have treated that young man since he got here.”

She paused and changed her tone so quickly, it reminded Sebastian of Molly Weasley when she had been yelling at Ron for stealing the car, and then suddenly began to sweetly speak to Harry.

“I am so sorry, Sebastian. I had no idea what your father had been up to.”

Her tone switched back instantly. “Lies are not moral behavior, Stephen. I paid for him to attend Dalton just like I paid for your father and for you to attend there. It’s a family tradition. He’s was a third generation legacy there, just as he is at Columbia, where he has made straight A’s, which is better than you did, I might add.”

“I already have an offer on the apartment.”

“Offers can be refused, which you will be doing. You will sell it to me for exactly how much you have put into it, so get calculating. I’ll expect proof of the costs. So, get your bank representative on that.”
The man next to Mr. Smythe began to get up.

“Stay. I’m not selling today.”

“Fine. Mr. Marshall, can you please give that updated copy of my will you printed up?”

He handed her a printed document and a pen.

“If I sign this, your inheritance drops to $1.” She picked up the pen.

“Stop.”

She put the pen down. “You’ve reconsidered then?”

“Yes.”

The bank representative got up.

“Good choice,” Mrs. Smythe said. “While he’s gone, I’d like to you tell me about why you kept Sebastian’s American passport and his other legal documents from him once he turned 18?”

He didn’t answer.

“I’m waiting. And while you’re at it, how about you tell me why you didn’t let him go home and visit his family?”

No response.

“I see the cat’s got your tongue. You took his car. You barely gave him enough to live on the last two years.” She reached for the photos that were still in front of Sebastian.

He slid them towards her and looked down, as if expecting a second verbal lashing.

She picked them up. “Trade places with Mr. Marshall please, Sebastian.”

They got up and switched places.

“Tell me about these boys.”

He pointed to one of the photos where you could see everyone’s faces. “That’s Kurt and Sam, and that’s Adam.”

“Where were you?”

“Oh, that’s at the Aquarium near Coney Island. We went there after we left the theme park. That was the last sightseeing day we had with Adam. He went back to London the next day. His play is being staged in London.”

“So, he’s a playwright?”

“And an actor. He just finished a one-year fellowship a Juilliard for playwrights.”

“Very nice. And Sam?”

“He’s not living with us anymore, except on the weekends. He’s attending college now. He’s studying art. He’s really good. He hasn’t found a good job where he’s living, so he’s still coming here on the weekends to work the job he’s had since last November.”
Isabelle spoke up. “He worked as an intern in the art department at Vogue until May as well.”

“And the last boy, Kurt, you said?”

“Yes. That’s Kurt Hummel.”

“Former Congressman Hummel’s son?”

“That’s the one.”

“He went to Dalton for a while.”

“He did. The year before I came.”

“Who is the boy with the tattoos in that other photo?”

“Oh, that’s Elliott. He was in the band Kurt put together after he first moved to New York. He graduated from NYU in May. He’s been working at Barnard College for a high school drama program this summer. Kurt’s been working there as well, as an intern.”

“And he works for Isabelle as her PA.”

Isabelle answered, “Yes, Grandma he does. He’s the best PA.”

“Fairy,” Mr. Smythe said. “What kind of man would work as your PA?”

“Stephen, we really don’t want to hear what you think about anything,” Mrs. Smythe said curtly. “Isabelle’s made her way to the top of her field with no help from you. She doesn’t need your approval or opinion on what she does or who she hires.”

The bank representative came back and handed Mrs. Smythe a print out. She looked it over and nodded. He pushed her out of the room and Mr. Marshall followed them. They returned 15 minutes later. She pushed the bank check to the center of the table along with a stack of papers with flag post-it notes on several of the pages.

“Mr. Marshall has drawn up a sales contract and it’s ready for you to sign. I’ve covered the expense of breaking your contract with the listing agent you hired. She’ll be here momentarily. Feel free to look over the agreement while we wait.”

At 2:00, Kurt arrived at the apartment after being summoned there via text on his way to the office. He opened the apartment door to find the table filled with Indian dishes from their favorite place. Sebastian, Isabelle, and an unknown-to-Kurt elderly woman sat at the table.

“You’re here!” Isabelle got up and threw her arms around his neck. “Come meet my grandma.”

Kurt put his bag down on the side of the shoe cabinet and followed Isabelle to the table.

“Grandma, this is Kurt Hummel.”

He offered his hand.

She said, “No handshakes. Give me a hug, young man. I’ve decided to unofficially adopt you. Sebastian’s told me all about how you’ve been such a good friend to him. Call me ‘Grandma,’ please, dear.”
Kurt smiled. “Yes, ma’am.” He leaned over and hugged her. “He’s been a good friend to me as well. Let me wash up so I can eat.” Kurt walked the short distance to the kitchen sink and started to wash his hands.

Sebastian came up behind him and quietly said, “It was worse than anything I could have dreamed up, but she blew in like Molly Weasley and gave my father hell. We’re staying in the apartment. I’ll explain it all later.” He grabbed some extra napkins and sat back down.

Kurt dried his hands before sitting down at the table. Sebastian passed a container to Kurt after he sat down. They ate their fill. And they all laughed while Grandma Smythe told stories from Isabelle’s childhood and her own.
Chapter 27

After they finished dinner, Sebastian offered Grandma Smythe a tour of the apartment.

“Of course, dear.” She pushed the wheelchair back, put the break on, and stood up. “Just let me hold your hand. I can still walk, just not for really long distances, and somehow my cane did not make it into the town car at the airport. And when I arrived at the bank, I had no idea how far it would be to where I needed to go, so I let the young man from the car service help me into the wheelchair.”

“We can get you a new cane easily enough,” Isabelle said.

Sebastian bent his arm and let her hold on to his forearm. They walked through the short hallway to the alcove. He turned back and pointed. “That closet has the washer and dryer. The other one has the water heater and the furnace and air conditioning unit in it.”

“If there’s a God, he should reward the inventor of air conditioning for improving upon his creation of a world where it gets far too hot to be comfortable.”

Kurt laughed. “Amen.”

Sebastian was laughing too.

She added, “Also rewards should go to all of the good inventors. Electricity, indoor plumbing, telephones, and the like.”

They all laughed.

“This is my room.” He leaned in enough to turn the light on. “There’s a bathroom just to the other side of the dresser, if you need one.”

Kurt stepped into his room and moved into the bathroom after turning the light on.

“This is Kurt’s room. He has a bathroom as well. The other guy you saw in the photos, Sam – he shares the room with Kurt when he’s here on the weekends. He’s the one that did all of the paintings.”

“Really? He’s quite good. And you said he’s gone off to college to study art, right?”

“I did. I think he’s really good too.”

“You two boys are very neat.”

Sebastian said, “There’s not really much else for you to see. Let’s go back down to the living room and you can sit down on the sofa and talk to us while we clean up from lunch.”

She sat down and got comfortable. “How about I sit on the sofa and you two tell me about yourselves. I let your father influence our relationship for far too long. You came in and you were so formal calling him ‘Father’ and me ‘Great Grandmother’. You were so aloof.”

“I was broken. I didn’t know any of you.”

“Broken? I don’t understand, dear.”
“Why did he tell you that I came?”

“He said that your mother had been letting you run wild and that he had let it go on long enough and that he was bringing you back to Ohio to bond with you and set you on the path to becoming a partner in his law firm, as was your destiny as his heir. And that I was never to mention your mother in your presence or his because she was going to let you flounder and never reach your potential or something like that.”

Sebastian said, “That’s interesting.”

Isabelle spoke up. “‘Interesting’ meaning that it makes no sense. I will tell her if you don’t want to talk about it.”

“My maman was hit by a car and died a few weeks before I arrived. Their custody arrangement remanded my physical custody him in the case of her death before I turned 18.”

“What?”

“That’s why I was so unhappy and unresponsive when we first met. And a little over two months later, I found out that nothing I could do would change the fact that I was going to spend an extra year in high school because my school in France didn’t provide me with the appropriate coursework to meet Dalton’s graduation requirements by the end of the school year. So, that first Thanksgiving, it had been a little over four months since I had lost my maman and a little not quite two months since I had broken up with my boyfriend because I had to stay in the States for a total of 20 months to graduate from high school, which was far too long to attempt a long-distance relationship with someone I had been seriously dating since the previous Christmas, so for about 7 months.”

“I might sign that other will yet today. Stephen is a disgrace to the Smythe name. You don’t want to be a lawyer, do you?”

“Not at all. I want to be a writer, maybe a professor some day. I was in a humanities track in France. I was missing required science and math classes – too many to take in a single year.”

“I see.”

Kurt and Sebastian had finished up the kitchen and came around and sat down on the sofa.

“Let’s start this again and you can correct all of my mistakes,” she said. “When you arrived, I had been home for about a month from having a hip replacement. I was still taking prescription painkillers. That probably contributed to my lack of questioning what Stephen said.”

“I’m not upset with you in anyway. I never expected you to do anything.”

Isabelle spoke up. “It took forever for me to get him to let me do anything for him.”

Sebastian said, “The truth is that after I came to the States, I was miserable. I was angry. I did things I regret, things I wish I could undo. Father’s newest wife is not a fan of children, and she had no use for me. She likes having father’s attention all to herself. I rarely spent time at their house. I honestly had no way of knowing that you even cared. You hadn’t kept in contact with me after my maman took me to Paris. You didn’t ever ask me to come see you personally after I came to Ohio. I only saw you at the larger family events. And so many people wanted your attention at those events, I never bothered to assert myself and be one of them since we weren’t close. My grandparents merely grilled me on the classes I was taking, my grades, and my extracurricular activities. No one bothered to ask about me as a person. Honestly, my assumption was that you had
more important things to be concerned about than me. I’m not trying to be rude, but you’ve spoken to me more today than you have in my entire life. I’m not angry about that. It’s certainly not your job to take care of me. That was my father’s job and my maman’s. It was left to him when she died, but he didn’t want to care for me – he wanted to change me. His parents are not like my maman’s parents, who actually care. But in all fairness, I lived with my grandpère and grandmère. By the time we went back to Paris, my grandmère had retired and she cared for me when my maman was at work. My grandpère retired a few years after that. They were caregivers and I lived with them, whereas Father’s parents were distant relatives that I hadn’t seen in nearly 10 years and they didn’t step up and make me feel welcome when I got here.”

Isabelle interrupted, “Before you go on, I want to point out that Simon was a pretentious ass before I was born. Simon is Stephen’s father, my uncle. My mother quit having anything to do with him outside the required family gatherings before I was born. So, Simon and Beatrice acting that was doesn’t surprise me in the least, which I’ve told Sebastian before, but Kurt didn’t know.”

Kurt nodded.

“Simon graduated from Dalton and went off to Columbia a decent young man. By the time he came back 6 years later, he was full of himself and despite my efforts to influence him, he remained a pretentious ass as Isabelle just said. I was busy with my own life running the law firm at that point, and I just let him be. It was his life to live. He joined Solomon’s law firm, married Beatrice, and they had Stephen. Our daughter Iris was younger by four years. She eventually married Lucas Wright. Isabelle is their daughter, of course.”

“I hate to break it to you, Grandma, but Stephen was an ass long before he left for Columbia, he was just good at hiding it from you. And when he started getting involved in politics, it only got worse. You didn’t raise him, so his upbringing doesn’t fall on you. I’m not sure where he learned to be such a homophobe. I know that my mother and father aren’t. I never spent that much time around Uncle Simon and Aunt Beatrice, so I have no idea about them.”

Sebastian said, “Well, it’s no secret that my father considers being gay to be morally depraved. Wherever that came from doesn’t really matter at this point.”

“It does to me. These men are my heirs. They will choose how to invest and spend the Smythe money. I do not want the money spent on political endeavors to discriminate against people. I was amongst the first generation of women born after women were finally allowed to vote. I grew up with segregated schools. I saw black men and women get to vote for the first time in the 60’s despite the fact that they should have been able to vote many decades before that. I will not willingly let the Smythe money be used to push down another minority group. I cannot control what Simon does with the money he has already inherited and invested, but I can most certainly do what I can to make sure that neither Simon nor Stephen invests a penny of what’s left of Solomon’s money in any way that oppresses people. Solomon may have written his will so that Stephen inherits half of everything, but when he died it was all left to me. My will currently reflects Solomon’s wishes to divide the family money between Stephen and Iris, but that doesn’t prevent me from rewriting my will and leaving $1 to Simon, $1 to Stephen, and the rest to Iris, Isabelle, and Sebastian.”

Isabelle said, “Yes, all of the women have names that start with I. Let’s see. Ida. Irene and Ivy. Imogen, Ingrid, and Ines. Iris. And Isabelle. That’s as far back as I know.”

“You’re right. I don’t have any brothers. Ida was my grandmother. Irene was my mother and Ivy was her sister. Ingrid and Ines were my older sisters. They passed away while Sebastian was in France. And then Solomon’s family tradition was to give all of the boys names that started with S.
Enough about that. I want to hear about. You said that when you came, you were broken. I understand that more now. You said you behaved poorly intentionally. I can also understand that. Somewhere in the back of your mind, you probably thought that if you behaved badly, Stephen might send you back home.”

“Actually, I hadn’t considered that. I think you’re looking at it from your original perspective that I had been misbehaving in Paris, so I came here to be put on the straight and narrow. I was a good student and I wasn’t doing anything inappropriate in Paris, unless you count sneaking into 18+ clubs to dance. From my perspective, I had been sent here because a piece of paper said I had to live with my father until I graduated from high school. I had no hope of being sent back to France no matter how I behaved.”

“You’re right, dear. I hadn’t thought about it from that perspective.”

“I guess the short version goes like this: I was mean to a few of people. My father’s statement of me acting like a Parisian manwhore had to have been from him having someone tail me to Scandals, which is a gay dive bar. I did not behave badly at Dalton. My unacceptable behavior was remediated on my own after I came to my senses and it only directly involved two people and peripherally a third and fourth because of their connections to one of the other two. But once my father learned about that he made sure I learned my lesson about besmirching the Smythe name. His goal was obviously to turn me straight, make me into a carbon copy of himself, and he failed. This is me. I’m 22 and I have three good friends, all of whom I’ve made since last November. I’ve seen my family in France once in the last four years. And that’s because I demanded that my father return my documentation so that I could be there when my grandpère passed away before Christmas. He refused to pay for me to go. First Sam gave me the money – all the money he had to his name. That’s the kind of person he is. Isabelle reimbursed him when she found out that my father had refused to pay for the airplane ticket.”

Grandma Smythe nodded, taking in the information. “These two people that you were mean to. Did they do something to you?”

“I was only mean one of them once. He just said something that annoyed me and I insulted him. The other person, I said something mean and did something mean and that was a result of the other situation.”

“And the other?”

“I hassled him for about three months, causing him a lot of stress. And the fourth person was affected by something I had planned to do to the person I had been hassling.”

“Why are you being so vague?”

“Because I don’t really want to talk about this. I made amends the best I could. I apologized to all of them. My father has punished me for what I did for the last three years and this morning he stripped me of my trust fund. And before you think I’m just being whiny and greedy, I didn’t have any idea how much money I was supposed to get. All he had told me was that it would be enough to pay the expenses on the apartment and my living expenses until I finished law school. I wasn’t expecting anything beyond that because that’s all he ever told me.”

“I’m sorry, dear. You’re right. My curiosity doesn’t need to be satisfied. You made some bad choices and did what you could to rectify them. That’s all we can ask of people. You were very young and you have been more than punished for whatever it was.”

Sebastian said, “I do need to tell you something else.”
“What, dear?”

“I didn’t want to get in the middle when we were at the bank this morning and I hadn’t told my father yet because I hadn’t made up my mind what I want to do when I finish college. I don’t need the second year’s worth of money that you made him deposit in that account for my schooling. I’ve been taking extra classes and I already had some college credits when I started. I’ll be graduating next May, not in two years.”

“I’m not concerned about it. You didn’t lie to anyone. No one actually asked you how much money you needed to finish out your schooling. I told the man to calculate the costs from the Columbia website, and then I added a few thousand dollars for books because he couldn’t find a cost for them. If you don’t need the money for school, use it for something else after you graduate. If your father hadn’t ripped your trust fund away from you this morning, you’d have gotten 40 times that much money.”

“He’s not going to be able to do something to take the money for school back will he?”

“No. It’s been deposited into an educational account. Once you graduate, the remaining funds that weren’t distributed to cover your school-related expenses will be distributed to you for you to reinvest.”

Isabelle said, “You can talk to Marissa about how it will work. Stephen can’t access that money anymore, period. So, you don’t need to worry that he’s going to somehow prevent you from graduating.”

“That’s a relief.”

“I’ll put an end to the PI following you as well.”

Kurt said, “He’s been having you tailed here?”

“Yes. He has lots of photos of me with you and Sam. He had photos from Sam’s birthday at the club. Photos of us at different touristy places. Coney Island. The aquarium. Photos of Elliott and Adam coming here. Obviously ones of you and Sam coming and going. The one of us the aquarium is actually really nice, if you can get over the fact that it was taken while I was being spied on.”

Kurt laughed. “Is it when the four of us looked like we were auditioning to be Rockettes?”

“It is.”

“I want that picture, spied on or not, that was a lot of fun. People have been tailing me for years. I’m used to it. After I was bashed, it picked up for a while. You know – ‘Congressman’s Son Gay Bashed in NYC’ made the news for a while.”

“I’ll get Stephen to give me all of the photos. You can do what you want with them.”

“Grandma, I hate to do this, but Kurt and I are going to need to go back to the office for a while. I had one huge meeting this afternoon that I couldn’t reschedule. Do you want to stay here with Sebastian?”

“Of course, dear.”

“Kurt, dear.”

“Yes?”
“Please bring me a new cane when you come back. If you bring me my purse, I’ll get you some money.”

He got up and got it for her. She pulled her wallet out and gave him a $50 bill.

“I’ll have Sebastian help me find a picture of the kind I want and have him text it to you.”

He put the money in his wallet and nodded. “Shall we then, my dear Isabelle?” He picked his satchel up off the floor near the door and opened it for her. “It was really lovely to meet you.”

“You too, dear.”

Once they were outside the building, Kurt asked, “So, he was supposed to inherit two million dollars today?”

“Yes. Stephen is a jackass. Grandfather Smythe would not be happy with what Stephen has done to Sebastian. First, he had all those affairs causing Marceline to divorce him and take Sebastian to France. She was a Columbia-trained lawyer as well. She wrote up the custody agreement so that Stephen would only get Sebastian over her ‘dead body’. He never paid a penny in child support or alimony. She never considered that she would die before Sebastian graduated from high school. Once she was dead, he could change the trust fund without her contesting. And Uncle Simon is my bet as to where the homophobic influence came from. Anyway, I bet he helped Stephen find a way to alter Sebastian’s trust fund so that he could keep from having to give it to him.”

The town car Isabelle called pulled up and they got in.

“So, Sebastian was just blindsided with that information when Grandma Smythe said that about the amount he’d have left over from the two years of money for college?”

“Yes. You had something planned for him for this evening, didn’t you?”

“I was just going to cook his favorite meal for him. I already ordered everything from the small grocery store I walk past on the way home. That way I could surprise him. What will happen to the apartment now?”

“Oh, it’s Sebastian’s now. Well, technically he’s the joint owner, but when Grandma dies, he will be the sole owner.”

“Well, at least he doesn’t have to worry about being homeless now because I doubt he’ll ever step foot in his father’s place again. Not that he would have before, but definitely not now.”

“So, back to tonight. What if you pick the food up and just keep it until later tonight?”

“I can do that. Why?”

“Because Grandma wants to take all of us to a show tonight. She wants to know what you think Sebastian would want to go see.”

“Well, there’s a lot of buzz about Hamilton, but it’s still in previews. I have no idea if she could get tickets.”

“Okay.”

“I’ve heard great things about the restaging of Shuffle Along – lots of tap dancing from my
understanding. He’d probably like that since he loves to tap, BUT that won’t open until winter or spring sometime.”

“Alright. See what you can find out about getting good tickets to something.”

Kurt laughed. “Alright.”

Three hours later, Kurt and Isabelle were back at the apartment. They left the town car and driver waiting in the parking garage in the loading zone.

Isabelle distracted Sebastian by taking him to his room and picking out an outfit for him to change into while Kurt put the ingredients for the dinner he was planning to make in the fridge and cabinets. He quickly washed his face and touched his hair up and ended up right behind Sebastian on the way back to the living room.

“Shall we then, Grandma?” Isabelle asked.

“Where are we going?” Sebastian asked.

Grandma Smythe responded, “Birthday surprise. Come along, dear.” She sat down in the wheelchair, holding her purse and the folding cane that Kurt had brought in with him.

“Kurt, dear, grab my overnight bag.”

Sebastian pushed her down to the awaiting town car. The driver put her bag and the wheelchair in the trunk while the four of them got in. He drove them to the theater and got her wheelchair back out for her.

“We’re going to a show?”

“Happy birthday, Sebastian,” Grandma Smythe said. “Let’s get inside.”

He pushed her to the wheelchair accessible area. Isabelle stepped into the seat next to the empty space for the wheelchair, and then Sebastian got the wheelchair situated next to her.

“You and Kurt have seats just slightly closer and towards the middle. Just come back here when the show is over. There weren’t four seats available in this exact area.”

Kurt looked at the tickets and walked to the correct row. Sebastian followed him down the row and sat next to him.

“I don’t know anything about this show. Is it good?”

“I don’t know. To be honest, I was tasked with finding something with availability tonight that all four of us would enjoy. A musical take on Peter Pan sounded like a good bet for the criteria.

“I guess we’ll see. I certainly wasn’t expecting a night out to a Broadway show.”

Kurt smiled. “Today’s been a crazy day.”

“It has,” Sebastian closed his eyes for a few minutes, trying to relax and be ready for the show to start.

A few minutes later, the curtain went up.
When the show was over, Kurt and Sebastian stayed in their seats for a few minutes, allowing the theater to empty a bit before they tried to collect up Grandma Smythe and Isabelle.

“Did you like it?”

“I did. The sets and the acting and the music and singing were all really good. The lead looks a lot like your Glee teacher.”

“That’s because he was my Glee teacher. I looked in the playbill at intermission. He was offered a spot in a Broadway musical the end of my junior year, but he turned it down. I guess he decided to give it another go. Dad said that he and his wife and their son had moved to Akron because the commute was ridiculous. He was coaching Vocal Adrenaline at the time. So, when the school closed there was no need for Ms. Pillsbury-Schuester to stay in Lima with the hope of Mr. Schue getting back on at McKinley. It seems that they moved here instead. I can’t imagine her wanting to live here though. Anyway, he was surprisingly good. He never sang like that for us. I had no idea he was that good. If you don’t mind, I’d prefer the fact that he was my teacher not be brought up in the discussion in the car.”

“That’s fine. I’ve had enough of Memory Lane earlier today. I have no interest in bringing up anything to do with high school. Let’s go grab Grandma and Isabelle and get out of here.”

Kurt nodded and stood up.

Once they were seated back in the car, Grandma Smythe said, “Well, that was just lovely. I always loved the *Peter Pan* stories and the music and staging to go with it was really beautiful. I hope you enjoyed it too, dear.”

“I did. It was really well done. I thought the staging and music was excellent as well,” Sebastian said. “Thank you for taking all of us. This is just the second show I’ve seen since I’ve been here. Kurt knew someone in a show who got us tickets about 6 weeks ago, I guess. Something like that.”

“Well, you should go more often. I’ll see to that. What’s the point in being in a magical place if you don’t get to enjoy any of the magic?”

Kurt smiled. It was a question he had asked himself many times.

Isabelle said, “Grandma is coming home with me for the night. I’d like Sebastian to come in the morning and the two of you can plan your day. There’s no sense in both of you sitting in apartments alone when you have time to get to know each other.”

“Alright,” Sebastian said.

“I’ve already put a car on reserve all day tomorrow, so feel free to plan whatever you’d like. I’m sure it’s been ages since she’s been to Columbia or you could take her to NYADA and show her where you’ve been working and where Kurt goes to school. Or anywhere. The Guggenheim. The MET. MOMA.”

With the lighter night traffic, it didn’t take them long to get back to the apartment. Kurt and Sebastian got out of the car and waved as they drove away. They went straight up to the apartment.

Kurt unlocked the door and Sebastian walked through. Kurt closed and locked it. “Happy birthday.
My original plan had been to make you dinner as a surprise. I had all of the things I needed on order and I picked them up this afternoon on the way home. They’re all in the fridge. I know it’s kind of late, but I’ll still make it for you if you want.”

“Will it keep?”

“Sure.”

“Would you mind if I just order something in and we talk?”

“That’s fine. Or there’s stuff in there I could make us a sandwich out of, but no peanut butter and jelly, I promise.”

“Sure. I think there’s a bag of chips in the cabinet that we didn’t eat when we went to Connecticut. Chips don’t spoil for like a year. They should be fine.”

“Alright. How about we shower and change into our pajamas, and then I’ll make us sandwiches and we’ll talk?”

Sebastian nodded. “That will work.”

Sebastian hopped up and sat on the counter while Kurt cooked.

Kurt cut the first sandwich in half, plated it, and handed it to Sebastian. “Croque madame, for you monsieur. Well, almost. I put the egg inside. It’s easier to eat that way.”

Sebastian took a bite. “It’s delicious.”

Kurt put the second sandwich on a plate and cut it in half as well. “Do you want to talk in here?”

“I just want to eat first, if that’s okay.”

“Sure.” Kurt took a bite of his. “It is good. That black forest ham we got is really good. Do you want some juice or water?”

“I’ll get some water in a minute. You don’t have to wait on me just because it’s my birthday.”

“I know. I don’t mind though.” He studied Sebastian’s face. “You’re struggling with the past again, aren’t you?”

Sebastian nodded, but he continued to eat instead of responding. When he finished, he put his plate in the dishwasher and washed his hands. He pulled a glass down, filled it half full of water, and drank it. He waited for Kurt to finish, and then went to sit down on the sofa. Kurt put his plate in the dishwasher, washed his hands, and got a drink as well. He followed Sebastian to the sofa and sat down with enough space between them for another person to sit.

“You’re right. I’m struggling with the past again. And I’m hurt that my father thinks so little of me that he basically disinherited me today. Although, I wasn’t surprised as evidenced by my breakdown last night, it was still a shock to sit there and be told that I wouldn’t inherit anything because I’m immoral.”

“There’s nothing I can say that will make this better. But I will be here to listen to you. I care.”

“And that’s my other struggle. You treat me like I’m someone special. I know you’ve forgiven me
and I said I wouldn’t bring it up and I haven’t. It just all got thrown back in my face today, so I’m sorry.”

“I’m not upset that it’s at the forefront of your mind. I’m upset that your father is such a mean person. I do have a question for you, though.”

“What?”

“When you were upset last night, you said you wanted me in the apartment not him, but you were really flustered. What did that mean, if anything?”

“What it means is that I think you’re amazing, and funny, and wildly talented. You’re smart and you’re kind. And you’re gorgeous. And no matter how many times I tell myself to stop, I keep wanting you to be more than my roommate and my friend.”

“More?”

“And I don’t think you feel that way about me and I won’t ask you to move out if you don’t because you really are my best friend and I don’t want to lose you.”

“I thought you didn’t want to date anyone because you were planning to go back to France?”

“I told myself that. Actually, I’ve told myself that a lot. Early on it was because I was still hung up on Pascale. But that was an amicable split in that neither one of us had done anything to cause it. There weren’t hard feelings towards each other, just the situation. I’ve been over him for ages – years. But you’re like a hurricane. You moved in and you forgave me and never brought it up again. You’re generous to a fault and exceedingly loyal. We still banter and tease. You’re just fun to be around. I feel comfortable with you here. And yes, more. But I won’t push.”

“What about France? You’re right that I am exceedingly loyal. And I’m not looking for an extended one-night stand. That’s not me. If we date, this will be a serious commitment for me. I know nothing is written in stone, but I don’t do casual dating. I’ve been working my butt off for three years to have the skills I need to have a chance to make it on Broadway, and I don’t want to give up on that dream before I’ve even begun to audition for roles. But I also know that long distance, isn’t for me, at least not France long distance. Someplace I could drive to or take a train to would be different, but not that far. I want to be with the man I’m with, not just talk to him.”

“That wasn’t a ‘no’.”

“It wasn’t. It was an ‘I don’t understand how France fits into this.’”

“So, you do actually like me?”

“Bas, I told you that I loved you months ago. Of course, I like you.”

“I know you like me as a person.”

“I would have just said ‘no’ as gently as possible if I didn’t – not the rest of the stuff about you leaving. But I know that I can’t let myself get that much closer to you knowing that you’re planning to leave New York in a year.”

“I’m not really planning to leave. I was preparing myself for that because in the back of my mind, there was always this feeling that as soon as I graduated and my father found out that I wasn’t going to go to law school, he would figure out a way to force me out of the apartment. I do miss Paris. But you know that I told you that it didn’t feel like home when I went back at Christmas.”
“I remember, but I don’t want you to put yourself in the position of having to choose between me and what you’ve dreamed of for yourself. Just like I said I can’t choose to start something with you, and give up my dream. Maybe I won’t succeed. Maybe I won’t get any parts. Maybe at some point, I’ll have to revise my dream if that happens. But all of the counseling this year has helped me see that I’ll never be at peace with myself if I let someone pull me away from what I’ve worked for again. I need to be true to myself and not resent someone later because I was too weak to say ‘no’ to start with. There have been numerous situations where I have agreed to something to keep the peace or to not rock the boat. And in the end I was angry with myself and I resented the people who asked me because they knew they were asking me to say ‘yes’ when they knew my answer would be ‘no,’ if weren’t being pressured. This isn’t exactly like that because I want to say ‘yes’, but I don’t want to end up resenting you or being angry with myself that I said ‘yes’, when saying ‘yes’ would mean giving up my dream.”

“I get that. I really do. I was there personally for one of those times. Given what I know, I think there are lots and lots of examples of that in your life. I’m not going to be another one. I won’t do that to you. I don’t really have any burning desire to go to graduate school right now. I was honest with what I said earlier. I want to be a writer. Maybe at some point, a professor, but not right away. If I decide to pursue that, I’ll go back to school after I give writing a fair chance. I can write here or in Paris or anywhere with electricity since I just jot down notes in my notebooks and I do my actual writing on my laptop.”

“So, if this were to work out between us, you’d stay in New York after you graduate?”

“I would. And I wouldn’t resent you for ‘making’ me stay here because I’M making a choice that I didn’t really know if I could make before. I would like to take you to France sometime, whether you agree to date me or not. I meant what I said about not being willing to lose you as my best friend.”

“I don’t want to lose you either.” Kurt scooted closer and reached out for Sebastian and turned his hand palm up offering it to Sebastian.

Sebastian slowly slid his hand across the surface of the sofa and gently covered Kurt’s hand with his.

Kurt closed his fingers around Sebastian’s hand and squeezed slightly. He looked up and smiled softly at Sebastian. “Okay?”

“Perfect.”

“Could we go lie down and talk more? I’m pretty tired, but I’m not sleepy.”

Sebastian nodded, and then said, “Sure.” He stood up, pulling Kurt with him. He turned the light on the bookshelf off and double-checked the door on the way to the bedrooms. “My room?” he asked, standing in the alcove.

“Sure.” Kurt let go of Sebastian’s hand and walked around the bed and turned the covers down and folded them accordion style at the foot of the bed.

Sebastian saw what he was doing and copied him. “Light on or off?”

“Maybe we could open the upper shutters and let the light in from outside?”

“That’s a good idea. Natural night light.”

Kurt was closer, so he opened both upper shutters on both of the windows. “Turn the light off and
let’s see if we can still see well enough.”

Sebastian turned the light off. “That’s nice.” He lay down in the bed.

Kurt got in bed and lay down on his back next to Sebastian and reached out for his hand again. This time he interlaced their fingers. “You know I’m a romantic at heart.”

“Umm hmm. I know. You’ve been romancing me and Sam for ages,” he teased. “And Adam. You do little things for us all the time. Is that how you like to receive affection? My therapist and I have discussed that book on love languages.”

“I think it’s not the little things that’s actually the affection. I think it’s quality time. I’ve looked at that list of love languages too. And initially I did think mine was giving gifts, but it’s not really. If you think about it, most of those little things I do, don’t actually involve a gift. It’s the time involved with choosing what to do and then actually putting the time into making it happen. I think that’s why I struggle so much with being stood up or people being late consistently. Not the kind of late because the train was late, but the kind of late that happens because the person stopped and did other things on the way to spending time with me causing them to be late. It makes me feel less important than the errands, like I was the last priority. I would rather spend an hour with someone eating a bowl of cereal than have them stop and order take-out, and then get to our date 30 minutes late. Those 30 minutes are really valuable when I’m super busy. Have you figured out what yours is?”

“Probably words of affirmation and quality time as well. I know you struggle with hearing words of affirmation.”

“I do, but not because I don’t need or want to hear them, but because they’re so rare for me to hear that I feel like I’m being teased or that they’re being said sarcastically. If I’m honest, having someone say positive things about me makes me feel like I’m on cloud 9, if and when I can force myself to believe that what was said was said honestly.”

“And Sam has taught you the art of physical touch as a love language.”

“Yes. He taught me that being touched doesn’t have to be scary.”

“And the two of you infected me.”

“We did. I’m proud of us.” Kurt laughed. “You like it and you know it.” He squeezed Sebastian’s hand.

“I do. I’m actually a pretty affectionate guy. I was mostly teasing you, you know.”

“I know. That’s why I was so insistent. If you had actually not wanted us to be affectionate with you, I would have never teased and pushed you. I do take ‘no’ for an answer, but you weren’t saying ‘no’. You were teasing us.”

“I was.”

“I think the only one we didn’t mention is acts of service. I think for me, rather than that being a separate category, it falls into the time category. It means a lot to me when I come home and you’ve already started dinner, not because I don’t like to cook with you, but on nights when I have a ton of homework, being able to get started on it sooner makes a big difference for me. So, you spending your time to give me extra time is considered an act of service, but for me it falls into the time category.”
“I think you might feel less like they’re combined when you don’t correlate time with everything.”

“Maybe. I don’t know. I just know that spending time with the man I’m involved with is really important to me, which I think is what fuels the part of the conversation earlier about me not being able to do a long distance unless absolutely necessary, especially not so far away as France for a couple of years. You had mentioned going to graduate school as soon as you went back, so that’s what came to mind. You being insanely busy there while I’m insanely busy here wouldn’t make much of a relationship. I’m sure it works for some people. And I’m not being critical of the people that it works for. I wouldn’t cheat on you. I would just really miss you. I was already feeling sorry for myself a while back. You remember. The day I surprised you by telling you that I loved you. I was bellyaching about how all of the men I loved were leaving me.”

“You did surprise me, but it made me understand more about you. You don’t do anything halfway. You really put all of yourself into everything, which is how you got hurt over and over and over again. You sacrificed yourself for other people who took you for granted, but I know that you’ve learned to step back just enough to only make reciprocal sacrifices now, rather than one-sided ones. I’m glad. I don’t want you to let me walk all over you. Your sass and wit are part of what’s so attractive about you.”

“You say that now,” Kurt teased.

“I mean it.”

“Okay. On to the fine print…”

“The fine print?”

“Yes. The part where we talk about our expectations. The thing that I’ve been working so hard to learn how to do in my counseling sessions.”

“Like what kind of expectations?”

“Well, how does us dating differ from us being best friends and roommates?”

“Well, hopefully, some time I’ll get to kiss you, maybe?”


“Well, in bed would be a good start,” he laughed.

“Umm hmm.”

“I can hear you rolling your eyes.”

“I’m sure you can. What are your views on PDA?”

“Well, if we’re dating, I’d like to be affectionate all the time. I’m not planning to hide the fact that we’re together if we’re out in public. I’d hold your hand, put my arm around you, hug you, and kiss you.”

“Okay.”

“Okay, you accept my answer? Or okay you’re good with doing all of that?”

“Both. For me, the line is probably at the point where the kissing turns to making out.”
“Okay. If I ever try to move past whatever your comfortable with, just tell me and I’ll dial it back.”

Kurt squeezed his hand. “Can we discuss things if one of us is upset about something? When I’ve been working on my ‘Traits my next boyfriend will have’ list for my counselor, I finally figured out what my number one trait is.”

“What?”

“Someone who won’t withhold love and affection from me because I’ve upset him. Followed by someone who won’t air our disagreements or private issues in front of other people.”

“I wouldn’t do either of those things, even if you hadn’t just specifically asked me not to.”

“Okay. What traits are important to you?”

“I think I’m pretty well versed in your traits and I’ve not see any that have bothered me. And I can’t honestly think of something that you don’t do that I wish you would, other than the kissing,” he teased again.

“So, your priority trait in a potential boyfriend is that he has to like kissing?”

“Maybe I need to be just a little more clear. Kurt Eli Hummel, will you please kiss me?”

Kurt laughed. “In a few minutes. Do you have any expectations regarding sex?”

“Such as?”

“If we’re dating, does that automatically mean that I have to have sex with you whenever you want?”

“No? I would want you to want to have sex with me. Is this some kind of trick question?”

“Nope. It was something I talked about with my counselor.”

“I’m getting pretty bad vibes about that question.”

“It was part of the getting expectations out in the open so I could decide whether I could live up to a potential boyfriend’s expectations. Some guys expect their dates to put out on the first date or the third or some arbitrarily decided number of dates. And then from then on, they expect to have sex at some point on every date. We live together already. I’m just trying to figure out how that fits into the ‘When will I be expected to have sex’ part of the expectations.”

“Oh. I don’t think about sex that way. I don’t see it as something you owe me. Whenever we both feel like we want to start taking steps towards that, then we can talk about it.”

“Steps?”

“Yeah. Like kissing to French kissing to making out to taking our shirts off and making out to maybe getting off together without taking the rest of our clothes off to hand jobs to maybe naked hand jobs. I don’t know. I never thought about an exact order, if there is one, but we can work up to it.”

“Oh, okay. That sounds nice.”

“Nice?”
“I’m not sure of a better word. Relaxing, enjoyable, and not stressful?”

“This conversation is making me wonder all sorts of things. How about we pause it here and I tell you that I think you are sexy and gorgeous. And yes, I want to kiss you and make out with you and all of that other stuff, but I won’t rush you or pressure you or manipulate you and any time you say ‘no’ I will stop and find out what’s bothering you. The point of being physically intimate with someone is mutual pleasure – not one person calling the shots. If I say ‘no’ I already know that you would freeze and find out what was wrong.”

“Okay. I trust you. Can I kiss you?”

“Finally,” he sassed. He let go of Kurt’s hand rolled on his side to face Kurt.

Kurt rolled over to face Sebastian, whose face was lit just enough that Kurt could see him smiling. Kurt reached out and put his hand on Sebastian’s face gently and ran his thumb down his cheek above the jaw line. “You’re sure?”

“Absolutely.”

Kurt could see his eyes sparkling. He smiled at Sebastian and scooted forward enough to be able to kiss him. He put his hand back up on his face and this time ran his thumb down Sebastian’s cheek and across his lips. Sebastian kissed his thumb as it slid across. He pressed forward a bit and Kurt met him halfway and their lips just grazed.

“Okay?” Kurt asked.

Sebastian answered by kissing him feather gently again. And then again with just slightly more contact – over and over again, each time slightly more until Kurt pressed in and kissed him tenderly, but firmly. They paused now and then, smiling. And then started the whole adventure over again, enjoying the build up each time.

After about 15 minutes of the feather kiss to gentle regular kiss, Kurt pulled back a little. “Now that we’ve kissed, is this what you want? Do you want us to be boyfriends? I’m only interested if you’re going to be exclusive with me.”

“I know. That’s what I want. Do you want to be my boyfriend? You’re not just going along with this because I want you to, are you? I only want to do this if you really like me too. I’m not asking for this as payment for you staying or something. I really do like you. And as much as I really enjoyed the kisses, we can stay just friends if you’d rather.”

“I think we’re both really nervous. Sebastian Fontenay Smythe do you want to be my boyfriend?”

“Yes.”

Kurt pressed his forehead to Sebastian’s. “Well, that settles that.” Kurt kissed him on the nose. “Truth time. How long have you liked me?”

“Define like.”

“Liked in a way that you wanted to ask me out?”

“A little over 6 months.”

“That would have been… right after you came back from Paris.”
“Yep. You weren’t ready then. I wasn’t ready then either because I hadn’t come to terms with the fact that you had forgiven me, and then went on with your life and included me in it. I’m not going to lie to you. You asked me a question, so I answered you truthfully.”

“Thank you. I know you know that being told the truth is really important to me. Even if I get upset when you tell me the truth, or even if I get really mad, or even if I cry, I will still trust you after I get over being mad at you. Do you understand that? Or can you at least accept that about me?”

“Yes.”

“I have another question.”

“Umm hmm. You’re always full of questions. That’s part of what makes talking to you so interesting.”

Kurt smiled. “Do you want to be open about this?”

“Open?”

“Are you going to tell Grandma Smythe and Isabelle?”

“Of course. Grandma is sharp despite her age. Right after you and Isabelle left to go to work, she asked me why you and I were not together. Isabelle figured it out ages ago.”

“I guess that’s not surprising. I mean we do spend pretty much every waking moment together that we don’t have to be apart.”

“If you’re willing, I’d like to expand that to our sleeping moments too. I never, ever thought I could be jealous of an inanimate object until you introduced me to Bruce.”

Kurt laughed.

“I wanted to take him and put him right back in his giant ziptop bag and suck the air out and flatten him.”

Kurt was shaking the bed with laughter.

“Oh, you think that’s funny do you? While you were in there snuggling Bruce, I was lying in here every night wishing that I could just get up the nerve to go in your room and tell you how I feel.”

“I’m glad you did tonight. I wouldn’t have asked you unless at some point you told me definitively that you had decided to stay in New York instead of going back to Paris next June.”

“Maybe at some point, we can go. I’d like the rest of my family to meet you. They’ll love you. I know I told you, but I’m keeping in contact with them this time. No more complete disconnect. Maybe I can convince my aunt and uncles to get my grandmère an inexpensive laptop like Sam got for school so I could Skype with her.”

“That’s a good idea. You could Skype with her every Sunday when we come back from shopping. It would be about 5:00 in the afternoon there.”

“That would be a good time. I’ll see what I can do. None of them are rich, but they’re not poor either. She has an old desktop system now. She can read her emails on it, but it doesn’t have a camera or a microphone that I know of.”
“I didn’t answer your question. I would love to stay and snuggle, just know that no matter how I fall asleep, I will be wrapped around you somehow when we wake up. Bruce or a body pillow will have to sleep between us if you don’t want me to lie all over you.”

“Sounds cozy.”

“I guess one last question for tonight. Can I still snuggle Sam sometimes?”

“Sure, but I’d prefer it from now on, if you sleep with me and not him if I’m home.”

“And you’re not going to get jealous and angry if we hug and he still holds my hand if we watch something intense?”

“Can I hold your other hand from now on?”

“Of course.”

Kurt leaned closer again and kissed Sebastian firmly on the lips, then lightly. He continued to vary the amount of pressure he applied. He licked at Sebastian’s lower lip, which led to Sebastian parting his lips enough that Kurt was encouraged to lick again. A few minutes into their second kissing foray, they were shyly exploring each other’s mouth. They kissed until they were breathless. Kurt pressed his forehead against Sebastian’s again.

“You’re a good kisser,” Sebastian said.

“So, are you. We should try to get some sleep.”

“Is there anything you need to do before we go to sleep?”

“Just brushing my teeth. I’ll go do that and come back.” He kissed Sebastian again, surprising him a bit. He got up and went into his own bathroom, brushed his teeth, grabbed his phone, and went back and lay down in Sebastian’s bed with him. He double-checked his alarm before he placed it on the bedside table. “Do you want me to close the shutters?”

“That small amount of light won’t keep me awake.”

“I’ll leave them then. I like being able to see your beautiful face.”

Sebastian reached out for Kurt and put his hand on the side of Kurt’s neck and placed a few kisses along his jaw toward his ear. “I’m going to take my toothbrush in your bathroom and brush my teeth again. I really want to kiss you more. You have cinnamon toothpaste of some sort and I don’t think my wintergreen or whatever it is will be a good match. I’ll be right back.” He placed a gentle kiss right below Kurt’s ear. He came back a few minutes later and lay back down. “I’ve never tried cinnamon toothpaste. I like it. Maybe, mint in the morning and cinnamon at night.”

“I had never tried it either, but Sam had some when we got to DC, so I gave it a try. How about those kisses now?”

Sebastian kissed him. Gentle at first, but building. They let themselves go and enjoyed the moment, some of the hesitation from earlier slipping away, but still keeping the playfulness of the varied pressure and spacing.

“As much as I am really enjoying this, we both have to get up in 6 hours.” Kurt kissed him again.

“You’re right.”
“Turn over and be the little spoon, so I can snuggle you. Unless you’d rather try lying on your back while I wrap myself around you like you’re a body pillow.”

“Mmm. Tough choice.”

“Well, it’s not a one-time offer, so you can choose differently tomorrow night.”

“Little spoon.” He rolled over with his back toward Kurt.

Kurt slipped his right hand under Sebastian’s pillow and scooted up behind him. He wrapped his left arm over Sebastian’s side and around his chest, placing his hand near Sebastian’s shoulder. “Scoot back some. You’re kind of close to the edge.” Kurt scooted back a bit and Sebastian scooted back against him. “Good?”

Sebastian took a deep breath. He positioned his left arm over Kurt’s and placed his left hand on top of Kurt’s and gently slipped his fingers in between Kurt’s. “Really good.”

Kurt placed tiny kisses along the skin right above the edge of Sebastian’s t-shirt. Sebastian readjusted just a bit and reached up under his pillow and slipped his hand under Kurt’s and held it.

The next morning, Sebastian woke up before Kurt did. The light coming in the room through the open top half of the windows woke him up. He lay still with a smile that reached his eyes. It wasn’t long before the light woke Kurt up as well. When it did, he placed tiny kisses on Sebastian’s neck like he had before they fell asleep.

“So, you’ve survived a night of being snuggled.” Kurt squeezed him gently in a half hug.

“I did and it was glorious. Even better than I had imagined. A+ snuggling skills.”

Kurt bit his lower lip and let it slide loose and leaned forward slightly and kissed the back of Sebastian’s neck. “So, boyfriends?”

“Boyfriends.” He picked Kurt’s hand up and kissed it. “Definitely boyfriends. Will you move in with me when you get home from work tonight?”

“I already live here.”

“I mean put your stuff in the closet in here and the dresser in here. Share this room with me and it will be our room.”

“Okay. Did you tell Grandma Smythe about the surprise party I’m planning for Isabelle?”

“I did. I’m going to go to Isabelle’s when you leave to go to work. I’ll take her out to see whatever she wants to see. I’ll have the car service drop us off at 12:30. We’ll wait for you in the lobby. Once you get there, you can help me figure out a way to sneak her into the conference room.”

“Okay. I took her gift with me on Wednesday because she was scheduled to be in the art department in a meeting when I start at 2:00. I hid it where she won’t find it, so I won’t have that to fool with today.”

“Once the party is over, I’ll take Grandma wherever she wants to go again until you two get off.”

“Okay. Just text me with where I’m supposed to be.”
“Scoot back so I can turn over.” He waited and once he had room to move, he rolled over and reached out for Kurt. “I …” He touched the side of Kurt’s face below the ear and let his hand slide down Kurt’s neck, and then moved it across Kurt’s shoulder. He rested it on Kurt’s upper arm. “I’m packing Bruce up. He’s redundant now.”

Kurt laughed. “He really got to you didn’t he.”

Sebastian scooted closer and slipped his hand down Kurt’s back. He held him close enough that Kurt’s nose was buried in Sebastian’s neck. Kurt started to kiss his neck, which elicited some delightful moaning from Sebastian. Kurt was careful not to leave any marks on his neck. A few minutes into the neck kisses, Kurt’s alarm went off.

“Dumb alarm,” Sebastian groaned.

Kurt laughed, but didn’t stop kissing Sebastian. “Ignore it. It will turn off in 30 seconds.”

Sebastian slid his hand down Kurt’s back to hold him in place. “It seems like I like neck kisses quite a bit more than I was previously aware of.”

Through the kisses Kurt paused just long enough to tease, “Is that so?”

“It is. Feel free to kiss me any time. Mmm.”

“It’s my last day of camp. I need to get up and show up on time.” Kurt pulled back and looked Sebastian in the eyes. “We can snuggle again tonight.”

Sebastian nodded. “I’ll behave, even though I really just want to lie in bed and kiss.”

Kurt winked at him. “Maybe tomorrow morning. If you plan something for us for tonight, don’t forget that Sam will be here for dinner. If he needs to dress up, just text him so he can show up a little early and change into something he has here from when he worked at Vogue.”

“Got it.” He released Kurt from the hold he had on him.

“Come on. You can’t just lie there looking adorable. Up with you.”

“You think I’m adorable?”

“Of course.” Kurt flounced out of the room to go back to the other bedroom to get ready.

When he came out, Sebastian was in the kitchen dressed and making them breakfast.

“Thank you.” Kurt poured two glasses of orange juice and sat them on the table.

Sebastian put two plates of scrambled eggs down on the table. Before he could get past, Kurt wrapped his arms around Sebastian’s waist. He hugged him, and then kissed him. When he let go, he winked, and sat down. They ate and cleared their dishes. Kurt still had 10 minutes before he had to leave. He cornered Sebastian against the counter, putting one hand on each side. He raised his eyebrows and licked his lips. Sebastian pushed forward and met Kurt halfway and kissed him enthusiastically, leaving both of them breathless.

“So, kissing in the kitchen is definitely on the agenda,” Sebastian said and then kissed Kurt again.

“You asked where I wanted to kiss last night. Definitely in the kitchen.”

Kurt smiled and laughed. “Duly noted. Come on. You can walk with me to the subway.” Kurt grabbed his bag and waited for Sebastian to grab his. Before he opened the door, he kissed
Sebastian again.

“Oh, and by the door is good too.”

Kurt rolled his eyes and smiled.

“I’m sure you had it in your hand when you were in the conference room. Did you check in there?”

“Can you go in there and look for me?”

“Not right this minute. I’ve got the scarf and I’m on my way back.”

“Fine, I’ll go in there and look.”

Isabelle stepped into the dark conference room and flipped on the lights.

“Surprise!”

She jumped. She scanned the crowd for Kurt. She smirked and nodded at him with a raised eyebrow. He pulled the scarf up and held it where she could see. She looked at the table and laughed. “Happy 21st!” was spelled out in raw vegetables and fruit. “This is the most unusual birthday party. Thank you.”

Everyone in the room moved from their places on the other side of the table to grab plates and eat or to talk to Isabelle before they had to leave. Once most of the people who weren’t actually direct co-workers with Isabelle had left, Kurt approached her.

“Happy Birthday!”

She pulled him into a hug. “You’re a sneak, you know?”

“I know.” He stepped back and pointed to the gift on the table. “But I’m a sneak with a gift, so I’m forgiven, right?”

“Ooh, I love gifts.”

She walked over to the table to unwrap it. She carefully removed the paper, and then opened the box.

“Oh, my God. It’s the Vivienne Westwood cape. I love it! It’s perfect.”

Kurt had a huge smile on his face. “I know. Put it on. Let’s see.”

She put it on and twirled around. “It’s lovely. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

Sebastian handed her a small box.

She opened it to find a vintage Trifari Bakelite geometric black and chrome circular pendant on a long chain. “Sebastian, it’s beautiful. Thank you.” She opened the clasp and put it on. “I like it. It’s has a very mid-century feel to it.”

“I’m glad you like it.”
Grandma Smythe moved closer so she could see it. “That looks like something from the 60’s.”

“It probably is. Kurt and I went back to the place he found the cape and I found it there.”

Isabelle leaned forward and looked around Sebastian directly at Kurt. “You went back there and still didn’t invite me?”

He winked at her. “You’re always busy when it’s open.”

“I told you – food poisoning.”

He just laughed.

“I love the idea you had for the food. Most of it vanished. Definitely one of the most well-eaten parties we’ve had. No one ever thought of spelling things out with rabbit food.”

“Sebastian and I are going to head out for some more lunch that isn’t something a rabbit would eat. We’ll see you when you two get off.”

Sebastian pulled her chair back into the room from the closet he had pushed it into to get it out of the way. She sat back down and folded the cane back up and put it in her lap.

“Thank you for coming today,” she leaned down and hugged Grandma Smythe before Sebastian wheeled her out.

After he grabbed a plate of food, Kurt dumped all of the vegetables into one of the bowls and all of the fruit into another and put them into the refrigerator. He picked his plate up and went back to his office, where he found Isabelle sitting in his desk chair.

“Unless you’ve been demoted, you’re in the wrong chair.”

“Well, I need details. Well, maybe not details, but information. Spill.”

Kurt cleared all expression from his face. “Information about what?”

“Don’t give me that angelic look.”

“Who me?” Kurt batted his eyes at her and popped a grape into his mouth.

“He told you, didn’t he?”

“Who told me what?”

“Just stop and tell me.”

“Yes.” He pushed a baby carrot into his mouth.

“Yes?”

He continued to chew politely, while looking at his plate to choose the next thing to eat. “He told me.”

Isabelle squealed. “I knew it. He looked way too happy for it to be from celebrating my birthday.”

“He said you had figured it out a while back.”

“Yeah, but he knew he wasn’t ready and neither were you. But now, I think it’s fantastic.”
“Me too. He’s a sweetheart underneath the sarcasm.”

“I know. Much like someone else I know.”

“You know someone else sarcastic? You’ll have to introduce us.”

“Have you told anyone?”

“Sebastian may have told Grandma Smythe by now. I’m not sure.”

“You’re not going to date secretly are you?”

“No. It’s just that it was really late by the time we finished talking and I worked at Barnard this morning and came here as soon as I finished to get your party set up. I haven’t really had time to tell anyone. We’ll tell Sam when he gets here and that just leaves my parents to tell.”

“And Adam.”

Kurt took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “And Adam.”

“That doesn’t sound good.”

Kurt leaned back against the wall of his office since Isabelle was still sitting in his chair. “He and I have never been more than friends, but he wanted more back after we first met. I just don’t want to break his heart if he still feels that way.”

“That’s tough.”

Kurt nodded. “Are you going to give me my chair back so I can do the work I’m getting paid to do?”

She stood up and he stepped out giving her room to leave. “I’ll need that scarf.” She snatched it off his shoulder and winked.

About 4:00, Kurt got a text from Sam telling him that he wouldn’t be in town until around 10:00. He got a text from Sebastian right after that asking if there was some way to add to what he had bought for his birthday meal so that all four of them could eat at the apartment. Kurt replied and called the small grocery store and requested a few more items.

When he got off, he took the subway back home, picked up the rest of the groceries he needed, and walked the rest of the way home. When he got there, he dumped the leftover vegetables from lunch into a colander and rinsed them. He laid them out on a towel and dried them off. He rinsed the fruit and let it drain.

His went to his room to answer the Skype call from Adam.

“Good evening.”

“Hey!”

“There you are.” A man Kurt didn’t recognize wrapped his arms around Adam’s shoulders and leaned in and kissed him on the cheek. “Hullo, Kurt.”
“Marcus?”

“It’s me. I know the beard throws everyone off at first. I got a small part in a show on the West End and I’d rather have my own than have one put on me every evening.”

“I can imagine. Congratulations on the part. That’s great! I haven’t seen you in ages. How did you two meet?”

Marcus answered, “I came home after I graduated in May. That’s when I auditioned. I replaced someone who took another role.”

“I guess I never realized that you and Elliott were in the same year. Congratulations on graduating and on the role too.”

“Yeah. He’s working at that camp with you. He said he met up with you again right after graduation. I had already flown back by then. I’ll let you two talk. I’ll be out back.” Marcus moved out of the camera view.

“So, you and Marcus?”

“Yeah. I didn’t know that you knew each other until just a bit ago. I guess I had never said your last name. He didn’t know that I had gone to NYADA when you were there. We started dating casually about a month ago, but we decided to be exclusive and start to tell people just a few days ago.”

“Congratulations. He always seemed like a nice guy. I didn’t know him well, but he and Elliott got along well and hung out quite a bit. How’s the show going?”

“That’s my big news. It’s gotten picked up and we’re going to open on the West End in November.”

“ADAM! That’s amazing. I’m so happy for you.”

“Me too. It’s so exciting.”

“Adam!” some one off-screen called.

“I’m being summoned. We’re having a celebration party for the move to the West End.”

“Well, go celebrate. You deserve it.”

“Thank you.”

Kurt went back to work in the kitchen. He pulled out a cutting board and worked on the vegetables first. He put everything in separate bowls. He chopped the larger pieces of fruit and cut the grapes in half and made a fruit salad out of it. He put it in the fridge to chill.

He pulled together everything else he needed. He browned the ground turkey and boiled the chicken. Once the chicken was done, he shredded it and sautéed it lightly in rosemary, salt, garlic, and a little olive oil. He assembled both pans of lasagna and put them in the oven.

He went back to the salad preparation. He finely chopped the different types of lettuce he had
gotten and put it all in a large bowl and tossed it. He made three different salad dressings and put them in the refrigerator. He put the rest of the shredded cheese into a bowl and refrigerated it as well.

His phone pinged with a text saying that they were on their way up. Kurt grabbed the table runner he had made and rolled it out. He grabbed their candlesticks and lit the candles quickly. When they opened the door, everything was ready.

“Happy birthday to you…” Kurt started to sing and the other two joined in.

“I thought we were ordering in.”

Isabelle waggled her eyes at Sebastian. “I never said we were ordering in. I said we were eating at the apartment. Kurt cooked a homemade birthday dinner for the two of us.”

“I see. It smells fantastic.”

Kurt looked back at the stove to check the timer. “It will be done in 15 minutes.”

“What is it?” she asked.

“You have your choice. I’ve made a chicken and spinach lasagna with a white sauce and a traditional lasagna with ground turkey instead of beef.”

“Ooh. Tough choice.”

“I also have a chopped vegetable salad and a fruit salad for dessert. We could actually get started on the salads. I didn’t know what Grandma Smythe likes on her salads, so everything is in separate bowls.”

Sebastian stepped into the kitchen to help Kurt get all of the bowls out. Once they were out, Kurt put out four bowls for them to use and let Grandma Smythe go first. Once she had chosen her salad ingredients, Sebastian carried her salad to the table for her. The rest of them prepared their own and put them at their places. Kurt pulled the pans out when the timer went off. They sat down and ate their salads while they waited for the lasagna to cool enough to be served.

Kurt got up to serve the lasagna. “Traditional or chicken and spinach?” Kurt asked.

“Half and half, please,” Isabelle said. “I can’t choose.”

“Me neither,” Grandma Smythe said. “I’d like to try both, please.”

“I want both too,” Sebastian said as he stepped up behind Kurt. He put his right hand on Kurt’s waist and stepped to his left holding the first plate to make it easier for Kurt to put the lasagna on the plate. He spoke very quietly so that only Kurt could hear him. “I told her.”

Kurt spoke just as quietly. “Isabelle figured it out.”

Sebastian took Grandma Smythe’s and Isabelle’s plates to the table.

“Oh, my. This looks fantastic, dear. You should have one of those TV cooking shows. You’re adorable. I’m sure you’d get lots of viewers.”

Kurt smiled. “Thank you.” He picked up his and Sebastian’s plates and carried them over and sat down. “I have good news to share. Adam’s show is going to open on the West End in November.”
“Adam is your blond friend.”

“Yes, Grandma. He’s the one who just finished that playwright fellowship at Juilliard.”

“That’s really fantastic,” Isabelle said.

“I know. I’m so excited for him,” Kurt said.

Sebastian asked, “Did he call already?”

“He did. They were having a celebration party, so we didn’t talk long.”

“This lasagna tastes as good as it looks,” Isabelle said. “Not that I’m surprised. Thank you for cooking for me, well for us. You know that I don’t eat homemade food often since I can’t cook to save my life. At least there are lots of tasty options here in the City.”

“I made enough that you can take home leftovers.”

“Mmm. Thank you.”

Once they had finished eating, Kurt and Sebastian cleared the dishes. Isabelle got up momentarily, but took her seat again.

“Sit back down, please,” Grandma Smythe said when they were done.

Kurt and Sebastian sat down again.

“I’m certain that my gift will be met with resistance, but hear us out please before you reject it outright.”

Sebastian nodded.

Grandma Smythe handed one card to Sebastian and the second to Kurt, who looked confused. “It’s for you, dear. Go ahead and open them.”

They opened them and read them. Kurt laughed at his. It had a slot for a gift card. “Thank you. You didn’t need to give me a belated card, but thank you.”

Sebastian wiped his eyes. “Thanks.”

“Those cards are for the two of you to buy plane tickets to France with.”

Kurt froze. “I can’t accept that. It’s too much.”

She responded to his complaint. “Just listen, please.”

Kurt nodded.

“I want the two of you to go to France and spend time with Sebastian’s mother’s side of the family. He’s been kept away from them for far too long. And he told me about your grandparents being French and how you’ve never been. I’m an old lady with far too much money to spend on my own. I’m not going to live forever and I’d like to at least see a few happy things happen because of the money I have.”

Isabelle was the next to speak. “I know you’re concerned about work. I have a plan for that. I’d like you to visit some of the design schools while you’re there and interview a few students and
take photos. Once you get there and get things arranged, I’ll arrange a photographer from the Paris office to go with you to do the photography. You’ll get paid for your work. I also talked to Carmen. She rearranged your schedule. Well, technically she rearranged a couple of class times. Anyway, you’ll have from 12-4 free on Tuesdays and Thursdays to come into the office.”

“That’s not enough hours.”

“It is. At least I think it is. I have a new girl that’s seems to have a lot of potential. You’ll have this whole week to train her. She’s a senior at Parsons. She’ll share the position with you for the school year, as an intern.”

“Why do I only have a week to train her?”

“Because you’re going to Paris with Sebastian for the rest of the summer.”

Kurt was too flummoxed to come up with a retort. He sat and listened as the other three talked for quite a while. Eventually, Grandma Smythe claimed exhaustion and wanted to go back to Isabelle’s to sleep. Kurt got up and packed up some of both types of lasagna for Isabelle. He packed up a salad and a bowl of fruit as well. He put them in a bag for her to take with her.

“Dinner was delicious, dear.” Grandma Smythe reached up and hugged Kurt.

“I’m glad you enjoyed it.”

“Please consider accepting my gift.”

“I will.”

Kurt and Sebastian walked with them down to the waiting town car.

“We’ll see the two of you for breakfast tomorrow before I leave town.”

“Yes, Grandma,” Sebastian said. “Good night.”

Kurt waved as they drove off. On the way back upstairs, Kurt got a text from Sam saying that he had decided to make the drive in the morning.

Sebastian was lying on his back in the bed when Kurt came in. He turned the light off when Kurt sat down. Kurt scooted closer, kissed Sebastian gently, and then snuggled up with his head on Sebastian’s shoulder.

“I can’t accept the trip. I’m sorry.”

Sebastian ran his hand along Kurt’s arm. “I know you have mixed feelings about it.” He kissed the top of Kurt’s head. “Just think about it some more, okay? I really want to take you to France.”

Kurt let himself melt into Sebastian’s embrace.
Chapter 28

Saturday morning, Sebastian woke up first again. Kurt had his arm over Sebastian’s chest and his leg over Sebastian’s left leg. Kurt began to stir as well.

“Good morning, handsome.” Kurt scooted closer.

“Same to you, gorgeous. I have decided that being your body pillow is a most excellent way to spend the night. Very cozy. Although, I’ll have to have repeated trials for each snuggle position to determine which is my preferred way of sleeping. Lots and lots and lots of trials. The more trials, the more accurate the final data, you know.”

“Of course.”

“And then, you know different types of clothing or none at all could affect the outcome, so we’ll have to have the variables trialed as well.”

“Definitely.” Kurt ran his hand along Sebastian’s cheek. “There is the small difficulty of the data collection. Will it be by point or percentage? What is the highest possible rating? How will the results be compared? By length of time you remain asleep? By how big your smile is when you wake up? How much of a sparkle there is in your eyes? There are a lot of factors that have to be weighed in.”

“It’s a very serious and detailed experiment, indeed.” He kissed the top of Kurt’s head and ran his hand down Kurt’s arm until he reached his hand and interlaced their fingers.

“Well, we have plenty of time to run all of your trials with all of the variables.”

“Something to look forward to. And all the kissing. The kissing was great. I might need a refresher on how great though.”

“Would you like me to kiss you, Bas?” Kurt tipped his head up and offered Sebastian a kiss, which he accepted. “I know it will take a few days, but we’ll get the hang of being able to do the things that we had only been wishfully thinking about before. I know we’re both a little hesitant now because we’d put each other in the friends-only box. But I’m pretty sure that I want to kiss you as much as you want to kiss me.”

“In that case,” he said, as he tipped Kurt’s chin up and kissed him again and again. He sighed and moved a little so he could face Kurt more easily and kissed him again. “we could be at this for a while.” He smiled with a smile that lit up his face. “I seem to enjoy kissing a lot more than I remembered.”

Kurt initiated the kissing this time. “Me too.” After a few more minutes of kissing, Kurt said, “Hold that thought.” He rolled back to pick his phone up. “We have two hours before the town car will be here.” He put his phone back down. “I propose we kiss and snuggle until my alarm goes off.” He rolled back towards Sebastian.

“I accept your most awesome proposition.” He pulled Kurt closer.

They were both ready early since they had allotted their usual amount of time, but they weren’t eating breakfast at home. Sebastian patted the spot on the sofa next to him. Kurt moved down and
sat next to him.

“Have you reconsidered?”

“I don’t know how to accept a gift like that.”

“I think a hug and a thank you might be just perfect.”

Kurt rolled his eyes. “You know what I mean.”

“I do, but I believe what she said – the part about letting an old woman do as she pleases with her money. This is what she wants to do.”

“I get that. I do. But Carole’s trying to get me to let her pay for my tuition this year and not take out any more loans. It’s just not me to let people pay for me like that. But then I try to look at it from the other side. If I had the money and I wanted to do something nice for someone, I would feel hurt that they rejected my offer. You’re already letting me live here. I just feel like …”

“Like you’re not a man?”

“In a way, yes, but not in the sense that I feel like I’m being treated like a woman. The opposite in this case is ‘child’. It feels like going backwards. I’ve been paying my own way for a long time. Stepping back and letting other people pay for things seems like a step in the wrong direction.”

“I can understand that.” Sebastian took his hand and kissed it. “I think Grandma sees both of us as barely more than children, but that’s because of how old she is. She was old enough to retire when we were born, so of course we seem really young to her.”

“Moving in here with you and no cost for six months seemed like the only solution to being able to stay in school at NYADA, and since I didn’t want to fall behind in school I agreed to something way outside my comfort zone.” Kurt squeezed Sebastian’s hand, and then turned and kissed him gently. “And that turned out much differently than I had anticipated in a totally good way.” He kissed Sebastian again. “I took a risk, and the payout turned out to be remarkably lovable and sweet, while still funny and snarky.”

“You left off the adorable part.” Sebastian bumped his shoulder against Kurt’s.

“And yes, adorable. And very kissable.” He kissed him again. “I want to go so badly, but it feels like taking advantage of you. I’m not that kind of guy.”

“Which makes you exactly the kind of guy I’m looking for. Someone who likes me for me, which I’ll grant might make you just a tad bit touched.”

“You’re a good guy Sebastian. If you don’t change that line of thinking, I’m going to start to sing to you.”

“That’s not really a deterrent, you realize? I love listening to you sing.”

*It’s funny how some distance makes everything seem small.  
And the fears that once controlled me can’t get to me at all.  
It’s time to see what I can do.  
To test the limits and break through.  
No right, no wrong, no rules for me.  
I’m free.*
Let it go, let it go
I am one with the wind and sky.
Let it go, let it go.
You’ll never see my cry.
Here I stand and here I stay.
Let the storm rage on.

My power flurries through the air into the ground.
My soul is spiraling in frozen fractals all around.
And one thought crystallizes like an icy blast.
I’m never going back. The past is in the past.

Let it go, let it go.
I’ll rise like the break of dawn.
Let it go, let it go.
That perfect boy is gone.
Here I stand in the light of day.
Let the storm rage on.
The cold never bothered me anyway.

Kurt squeezed his hand. “So, the lyrics don’t EXACTLY fit, but the sentiment is right. All that stuff has been left behind. The you that was angry and mean, the me that was so tired of being alone that I gave myself up to have people in my life – we’re not those guys now. We’ve grown, we’ve let things go, we’ve worked through things, and we’ve learned from our mistakes. We’ve come to trust each other.”

“So then, please trust me when I say that you are not taking advantage of anyone by agreeing to go to France with me. Should I have declined going to the Fourth of July family gathering with you because your dad wouldn’t let me pay for at least part of the house rental cost?”

“No.”

“Then how is this different?”

“The rental on that place was around $250 I think – nowhere near the cost of going to France for a month.”

“You’re thinking strictly in dollar amounts, not proportional costs. That house rental cost a higher percentage of your dad’s income or net worth than a trip to France for the two of us will be for my great grandmother.”

“Still…”

Sebastian gently turned Kurt’s face back towards him. “If logic won’t work, how about bribery?” He kissed Kurt, and then said, “I can kiss you on the Eifel Tower if you come to France with me.”

“Bas…”

“Yes, sweetums?”

Kurt raised an eyebrow and gave Sebastian the ‘What on earth did you just call me’ look.”

“Cupcake?”

Kurt tilted his head and gave him an ‘over my dead body’ look.”
“I’ll have to work on it.”

Kurt laughed. “You do that.”

“How about the truth? If you tell Grandma ‘no’ at breakfast, she will spend the entire breakfast trying to persuade you to change your mind. She’s old, Kurt. She’s upset that my father just disinherited me. It’s a smack in the face to a woman who did her best to raise her son right, but somehow that son raised a homophobic son who disinherited her only great grandchild. She wants to do something nice. She can’t undo how he behaved, but she can pay for me and the person who has become my best friend and who is now my boyfriend to go back and visit my family.”

“I see your point, but how do I overcome the feeling of being a mooch or a freeloader?”

“Am I a mooch or freeloader for living here?”

“No. It’s your apartment.”

“My name is on the deed now. That’s true, but I didn’t come up with half of the money to pay for it, so does that make it less mine?”

“Your grandmother bought it for you, so it’s yours.”

“She is giving you a trip to France, so it’s yours.”

Kurt rolled his eyes.

“And back to the apartment. I’m not paying anything to live here and I didn’t pay for it, so that puts us in the same position. Please, please live here with me and don’t feel bad about it. I want us to be happy together. We have been for months. Don’t start overthinking everything now that we’re finally together.”

“Okay. I’ll try. I had already decided that I was going to start paying you rent starting in August since your requirement of not making any money on the apartment was expiring on your 22nd birthday. That probably has more to do with my reticence than anything else. I had already worked it out in my head how I was going to pay you what I used to pay on the loft, even though I know you could rent my room in this apartment for more than that because of this location.”

“What makes you think I would have agreed to that?”

“I don’t know. It just seemed right. I like it here and paying rent is part of life.”

“Well, not anymore. I wouldn’t have taken the money anyway. Or if you had deposited it in my account or something, I would have just secretly used it to somehow pay down your school loans or something.”

“Wait. That’s why Isabelle thinks I can live on working 8 hours a week. She knows you wouldn’t take any rent money.”

“Well, that’s true. She does know that.”

“Things are starting to make more sense.” Kurt’s phone alarm went off. “The car will be here in five minutes.” He stood up and pulled Sebastian up and into a hug. “I’m going to try. It’s the best I can offer for now. I’ll put working through it on the top of my list of things to deal with in counseling – how to accept kindness without feeling like I owe people something. For now, I will move the issue to the ‘I trust Sebastian to tell me the truth and he told me I am not being a
freeloader’ file folder.

“You have a lot of file folders.”

Kurt kissed him. “You have NO idea. Some people have ‘baggage’. I have an industrial-sized, 4-tiered file cabinet full of files, or I did have. I’m paring down. Perhaps, I’m down to a 2-drawer, office-sized file cabinet now.”

Sebastian laughed.

Kurt opened the door. Sebastian followed him out, but didn’t step up next to him.

“What are you doing?”

“Enjoying the view? Wondering if you still have those gold pants that you wore in that ‘Not the Boy Next Door’ video.”

“Oh, my God.” He stopped and took Sebastian’s hand and walked next to him. “Have you been watching that on repeat or something?”

Sebastian pressed the elevator button. “Not in the last few days.”

“Sebastian Smythe!”

“I don’t actually have a personal copy of that video, although I wouldn’t mind having one.”

“You are a handful.”

The elevator door opened and they got in.

“I think you’ll find that you’ve underestimated.”

“Sebastian!”

“Yes, honeybunch?”

“No. Just no.”

“Sweetums?”

“No way.”

“I’m going to need some help then. I’m afraid I really don’t know that many nicknames in English.”

“Then choose one in French.”

“Good idea. Then I can call you cupcake and hardly anyone will know what it means.”

“No cupcake.”

“Mon chou?”

Kurt sighed. They exited the elevator and walked toward the parking garage to get into the town car.

“Mon lapin?”
“Seriously?” Kurt laughed.

“Mon rire?”

“That’s sweet, but everyone would think you're calling me an ass all the time.”

“That has potential then. I am rather fond of your ass.”

“Shh!” Kurt shut him up with a kiss before he opened the car door.

 Breakfast was an interesting affair that more resembled a business meeting than a family meal.

“You’ll need to take these with you and keep them safe.” Grandma Smythe slid an envelope that would hold a sheet of paper folded in half across the table to Kurt.

“Yes, ma’am. What’s in here?”

“They’re certified copies of your mother’s birth and death certificates. You’ll more than likely need them to get any information out of the French government or whoever you can get to help you look into whether you still have any family members still living in France. There is also a certified copy of your birth certificate in there. I didn’t know if you had yours. You’ll need it for the passport application.”

“Oh. You are far ahead of me on all of this.”

“I’ve had nearly 70 years experience of dealing with government, laws, and paperwork.”

Kurt smiled.

“Now, Sebastian already made you an appointment to get a 1-day expedited passport at the appropriate office on Monday morning. He’ll go with you where you need to go for the photos and then to the office to get the passport. The money order to cover the passport cost is in the envelope as well.”

“Thank you. You’ve gone to a lot of trouble.” Kurt carefully put the envelope in his satchel.

“Nonsense. Running a law firm for 45 years was a lot more trouble than this.”

“I’m sure it was.”

“Sebastian can tell you about the plans he made later. I still haven’t gotten to see Sebastian dance or hear you sing. I’d like to change that before I leave town. Do you think that would be possible?”

Sebastian said, “I’ll see what I can do, if you’ll excuse me for a few minutes.” He got up from the table and went outside the restaurant.

“I can make a copy of the CD that we made before Adam went back to England. He wanted to do something fun to remember his time here in New York.”

“That would be nice dear, but I would also like to hear you sing in person.”

Sebastian returned to his seat.

“If you’ll excuse me for a moment as well.” Kurt went outside and called three of the musicians
that typically played for the Apples. Once he finished his calls, he went back inside.

When Sebastian finished his food, he said, “Cassie can meet us at NYADA at 11:00.”

“That will work. I found three people who can meet me there at 11:30.” He took his phone out and quickly confirmed the time. He finished up his food.

“We have a little time to go to Central Park then, don’t we?”

“Sure, Grandma. I’ll just need to run up to the apartment and get my dance shoes before we head that way.”

She nodded. “Of course, dear.”

The server came back around to take their plates and offered them more coffee. They declined. She left their bill, which Grandma Smythe picked up, slipped a credit card into the holder, and put it on the edge of the table.

“So, what do the two of you and your friends do for fun?”

Kurt answered, “I sleep.”

She laughed. “I see. Anything else?”

“Grandma, you saw our place. We study, Kurt works, we read, we cook, we watch DVDs sometimes, we listen to music, sing, dance, and we talk. And we go sightseeing every other weekend. We’ve gone to art shows, free concerts in Central Park, and we went skating in Rockefeller Center in December. That was fun.”

Kurt added, “There was the cheese shop. And we go to secondhand bookshops and vintage clothing shops. We browse a lot, but sometimes we find really cool things like the cape I gave Isabelle. I’ve found some really nice things for a good price at that place.”

“You ARE going to take me there. If you tell me when, I’ll even make sure that I don’t actually inconvenience anyone by getting sick and having to go home.”

Kurt laughed. “Aren’t you supposed to be a good role model?”

“I am. I’m teaching you the art of not inconveniencing anyone for your whimsical shopping trips to awesome vintage stores. You already know how to follow all of the rules, make good grades, work hard, be a nice person, and all that. You need someone to show you how to walk on the wild side.”

Sebastian asked, “By going to vintage clothing store when you work for a fashion magazine?”

“Hush you,” she teased. “I really want to go to this place. I need him to take me there. You’re not helping.”

“Oh, right. She’s right, Kurt,” Sebastian deadpanned. “You should take that walk on the wild side to the clothing store.” He winked at Kurt.

Kurt laughed. “Fine, fine. You win. I’ll take you there, but you have to do your very best not to blow my cover. You can go in five minutes before me and pretend like we do not know each other. Not all the prices are marked and if the guy thinks he can get more out of me, I’ll lose my angelic, poverty-stricken student, low-price possibilities. It’s easy to take Sebastian there. He’s clueless.”

“I knew my clueless look would come in handy some day.”
“But you can’t tell anyone else. Seriously, if a bunch of people wearing thousand dollar suits show up, the guy will raise all of the prices and those of us on shoestring budgets will lose out on our source of great vintage clothes and accessories.”

“I’ll be good. I promise. I’ll wear my workout clothes and put my hair in a pony tail, if it will make you feel better.”

“Perfect.”

“You’ll take no photos of me dressed like that and I’ll keep your little vintage store a secret from everyone else.”

“Done. The store has weird hours. That’s why I don’t that often, but since I’m off this week in the mornings, we’ll go.”

“Excellent.”

The server had picked the credit card folder up at some point. As she returned it, she thanked them for coming in. The four of them stopped outside the door.

“Why don’t we just walk and you can call the car service to pick us up at the apartment again? Sebastian can go ahead of us and grab his shoes.”

Sebastian said, “That’s fine.” He walked at a faster clip toward the apartment.

Kurt said, “We could have walked here and met you.”

“I didn’t know how close the two places were to each other. It’s fine,” Isabelle said. “I just remembered the name of the restaurant when you told me the food was good when you went there with Rachel.”

Grandma Smythe spoke as soon as Sebastian was out of hearing range. “He’s so much happier in just two days. I know Thursday was rough on him, but I could see it in his eyes when he got to Isabelle’s Friday morning. I know that you’re struggling to accept the trip and the lack of needing to pay to live in the apartment with Sebastian. I don’t know much about your life up to his point, but I have to doubt that it’s been filled with many caring people with how hesitant you are about me being kind to you. As an old woman, what that says to me is that you need it all the more. The only other thing that comes to mind is that you feel the need to refuse our help because you want to be able to say that you made it big completely on your own, that you pulled yourself up by the bootstraps and worked your fingers to the bone making it big.”

“I hadn’t actually considered that line of thought, but you bringing it up makes me think that it’s probably not far from the mark, but not because I want to brag in some memoir, but just because of the way I was raised. When my mom died, I was very young, and I grew up quickly. I learned the price of things and the cost of things. The price being the number of dollars needed to acquire something or pay a bill and the cost being how much time my dad would spend at the shop working to have enough money to pay for everything. My dad made me work for what I wanted. He’d tell me that if I wanted it bad enough, I’d work hard to get it.”

“And letting me help you doesn’t fit that ideology.”

“Not at all. I want to go to France more than I can express, but by accepting the ticket from you, I don’t feel like I earned the right to go and enjoy myself.”

“I can understand the sentiment. But your father seems a decent person and I don’t think he meant
for you to grow up feeling alone and unsupported by the people who care about you. I think he just didn’t want you to be a lazy slacker. And obviously, you aren’t. If you’re so hesitant about feeling like you’d let him down by accepting the trip, call him and talk to him about it.”

“That’s a good idea. I’m going to run ahead really quickly and put that envelope you gave me in my room instead of carrying it around with me today.”

They switched positions and Isabelle pushed the wheelchair the last block. By the time the two of them arrived, the town car was pulling into the garage. The driver got out, pushed Grandma Smythe the rest of the way to the car, and loaded her wheelchair in the trunk. Kurt and Sebastian were back down by the time Isabelle and Grandma Smythe were situated comfortably. When Kurt and Sebastian got in, Kurt told the driver to take them to Central Park Conservatory Garden area.

After they all got out and started on their walk through the gardens, Kurt said, “Would it be okay if I just sit for a little bit and think?”

“Sure, dear. Gardens like this are good places to think.”

Kurt walked away from the three of them and found a bench nearby where he could sit and just think for a few minutes. He pulled his phone out and called Burt.

“Hey, kiddo. What’s up?”

“Do you have time to talk for a bit?”

“Yeah, sure. Just give me a second.”

Kurt heard the noise from the TV stop.

“Okay.”

“So, a lot of things have happened in the last couple of days.”

“Alright.”

“Sebastian’s father disowned him on his birthday, but Isabelle called her grandma, who is Sebastian’s great grandma. She flew here and arrived a few hours later. I wasn’t at the meeting, but from the retelling it sounded like she came in like an avenging angel and let his father have it. She bought the apartment from him, under the threat of disowning him. So, now the apartment is in her name and Sebastian’s name.”

“Well, that’s good that Sebastian isn’t going to end up without a place to live. And you too, I guess. Although you hadn’t really said what you were doing past the end of the summer.”

“So, about that…”

“Yeah?”

“After everything went down, we went to see a show for Sebastian’s birthday with Isabelle and Grandma Smythe, which was nice. And after we got home, Sebastian and I had a long talk.”

“And you’re dating?”

“Dad! You’re not letting me tell this, but yes. I hadn’t been willing to start anything because I
thought he was definitely going back to France in a year. His father had forbidden him from seeing any guys in order to live up to his expectations. Anyway, all of that is a big mess and it was pretty much a losing cause for Sebastian because by ‘no guys’, his father basically meant ‘become straight’, not just don’t date anyone until after you turn 22.”

“One of those types…”

“Yeah.”

“So, now that he’s 22 and he’s been disowned and he’s free from his father’s rules, he told you that he likes you and you’re dating?”

“Yes. But that’s not all of it.”

“I didn’t expect that it was. You don’t usually call me over something small. You’re a grown man. You don’t need my permission to date someone. So, what’s bothering you?”

“Well, remember how you always told me to work hard to get what I wanted?”

“Of course.”

“Why did you tell me that?”

“I don’t understand.”

“Sebastian’s great grandma gave me a belated birthday gift, which is far too extravagant, but she insists that it is not, even though I insisted that it is. She said some things that made me wonder things about why I view things the way I do.”

“You’re torn between accepting a gift you really want and turning it down because you didn’t work for it.”

“Exactly.”

“Working hard for what you want and accepting the generosity of others aren’t mutually exclusive. You can do both. So, that’s what’s been bothering you about letting Carole pay your tuition and why you wouldn’t let me give you any money?”

“Pretty much.”

“That’s not what I meant Kurt. Obviously you were too young to understand when I told you that.”

“So, explain it now, please.”

“All I meant was that you shouldn’t expect other people to do for you what you could do for yourself.”

“Oh.”

“Back then it was just little things, like you waiting for me to get something down for you. So, I’d tell you to get a stool and do it for yourself. Sometimes it was because you were such a little perfectionist. You’d want me to do something for you because I could do it ‘right’ and you couldn’t yet. I was trying to encourage you to believe in yourself. I’d tell you that if you wanted to be able to do it ‘right’ some day, that you’d need to put the work and effort into it yourself.”

“I remember. I think you’re right though. I was too young to understand the overall meaning of the
words and I just took them literally. So, I quit asking for help from you and I would do things over and over to master them in my room by myself.”

“Well, that wasn’t the goal I had. I was just hoping that you would learn to accept that sometimes ‘good enough’ really was just that. Instead, I turned you into a secret perfectionist.”

Kurt laughed.

“A secret perfectionist who thought that asking for help was wrong and accepting freely offered help meant that you weren’t pulling your own weight. That’s really not what I meant to do at all. I should have just helped you more until you were older, like maybe 10 or 12.”

“There’s nothing to be done about that now. But you wouldn’t think less of me if I accept the gift?”

“What is this gift?”

“A trip to France with Sebastian to visit his family there and to maybe find any of mom’s remaining family.”

“You should make up your own mind, but I won’t think less of you. Just like I won’t think less of you if you let us pay your tuition this year. I wanted to help you with your school expenses. You just kept saying, ‘I’m fine, Dad. I’ve got it covered.’ – when what you meant was that you had taken out enough loans to buy a small house already. I was really busy at first, but I did some research of my own after things settled down this spring. I have a good idea how much you’ve borrowed. There’s no way that you’ve been able to do anything but barely keep your head above water with living expenses there.”

“That’s true.”

“You keeping everything from me all these years makes a helluva lot more sense now. Are you going to stay in the apartment with Sebastian? Is that your other dilemma?”

“He says I don’t need to pay anything since he’s not paying anything. But it’s his place.”

“Which makes the shots his to call, doesn’t it? If you owned something, would you charge him to live there with you?”

“No.”

“Then there you go. It’s his place. He can let whoever he wants live there at whatever price he chooses. You can either accept his terms or not. But honestly, the two of you get along really well and it seems utterly insane for you to keep working yourself into the ground to live somewhere else because you’re stubborn.”

Kurt sighed. “It’s not stubborn. I’m sure it looks that way to other people. It’s just how I’ve always felt. You may not have meant to instill that lesson in me, but it’s in there deep and wedged in tight. It feels like cheating because not working hard and having a nice place to live doesn’t seem right.”

“Well, you’re going to have to come to terms with all of that. Maybe you can talk to that counselor about it whenever you go. But in my mind, living with Sebastian for free makes the most sense of anything you’ve done since you moved out. You need to finish your last year of school and if you can do it without so much stress from working so hard to just to pay to live, then doing that makes sense to me.”
Kurt could see the others making their way back through the path toward him.

“I have to get going. They’ve come back for me.”

“Alright. I’m glad you called. I hope you two are happy together.”

“I am, Dad. It’s so much different.”

“Good. Call anytime.”

“Thanks, Dad.” He stood and put his phone back in his pocket. He walked towards them as they headed his way. Once he was walking back with them, he put his hand on top of Sebastian’s since he was pushing the wheelchair. They walked around another area together for a bit before they went back to the car.

Halfway through their tour of NYADA, Sebastian left them to go warm up with Cassie.

After 15 minutes of silent stretches and warm-ups Sebastian finally broke the silence. “I have no idea what to offer you in exchange for doing this, but I really appreciate it.”

“Look, Sebastian, I may not be known for being a decent human being, but I had a great granny once and if she had shown up here in New York unexpectedly, I would have done whatever she asked, but she was gone before I came here. I get it. Mine thought I hung the moon and made me tutus. I wish she were still around to show off for. Let’s go wow your great granny.”

“Thank you.”

While Cassie and Sebastian warmed up, Kurt finished the tour. “And this is one of the smaller auditoriums where we put on small in-class performances.”

“Well, I loved that round room. That was very nice. But I understand that students aren’t allowed to use a big performance hall like that without permission. This smaller theater room will be just fine.”

Sebastian and Cassie came in. He and Kurt helped her out of her chair and down to the area Kurt thought was the best for the view and the acoustics. Sebastian left his bag with Kurt. He carried his tap shoes up on the stage to change into later. Cassie hooked her iPod up to the speakers in the room and she and Sebastian moved to the center of the stage.

For the next 20 minutes, the two of them performed a variety of pieces in different styles. When they finished, they bowed. Cassie stopped by where Grandma Smythe was seated and introduced herself.

“Sebastian’s a great dancer and he’s been an excellent TA. I’m glad he got a chance to perform for you. It was nice meeting you.”

“You too, dear. The two of you look lovely together.”

“Thank you.” She left the auditorium.

Sebastian grabbed his bag to change his shoes.

“Sebastian, dear, thank you for doing that for me. You are so much fun to watch – all that energy and enthusiasm. Are you sure you’re not interested in being a performer?”
Kurt left to warm up for a couple of minutes in the classroom across the hall with the musicians. Sebastian responded, “I do love to perform, but I’m not sure that I would enjoy doing the same musical or performance night after night. Maybe I would. I’m not completely opposed to the idea. I’m not really interested in learning a lot of lines or being the lead, at least not right now.”

“Well, you have the talent for it.”

“Thanks.”

Kurt and the musicians entered the auditorium. He selected the songs as sort of a musical history. He sang “Le Jazz Hot”, “Defying Gravity”, “Being Alive”, “I’m Still Here”, and “Not the Boy Next Door”, and “Break Away”. When he finished, he thanked the musicians. They left out the side entrance. He went back down to where the other three were.

“Kurt, dear, you’re a fantastic performer. That was just lovely. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

Isabelle said, “Now I see why Carmen is so determined to keep you.”

Sebastian asked Grandma Smythe, “Is there anything else you’d like to do before it’s time for you to go to the airport?”

“There is. I want to go to the hot dog place that Isabelle was talking about.”

“Seriously, Grandma? We could go anywhere in Midtown and you want to go to a hot dog shop?” Isabelle asked.

“That and a slice of New York City pizza. I’ve already lived to be 87, don’t lecture me about my food choices, young lady,” Grandma Smythe teased.

Isabelle laughed. “Yes, ma’am. One Gray’s hot dog coming up.”

“And the pizza.”

“And the pizza.”

“And I’d like to meet Sam. Maybe we can end lunch with a nice coffee in the shop where he works.”

Sebastian said, “We can do that.”

Sebastian pushed the wheelchair into the Copper Cup. Kurt and Isabelle followed them in. It didn’t take long for Sam to see them. The four of them got in Sam’s line and waited to order. When they got to the head of the line, they ordered and Sebastian introduced Sam to Grandma Smythe.

“It’s nice to finally meet you, dear. I had hoped you’d be having dinner with us yesterday, but you didn’t make it into town.”

“Sorry about that. It’s nice to meet you as well. Let me see if I can take my break now.” He turned and asked. When he was given the okay, he filled a cup with water and went to find a table.

Sebastian followed him and pushed Grandma Smythe up to the table, and then sat next to her.
Isabelle and Kurt brought all of their drinks to the table.

“I’m leaving this afternoon, so I wanted to be sure to get a chance to meet you before I left. Your paintings in the apartment are lovely. I’d like you to do one for me, if you have the time.”

“Sure. My classes will end fairly soon, and then I’ll have a break before the fall semester starts.”

“Alright then. I’ll mail a photo of what I want painted.”

“That will work.”

“Kurt and Sebastian said that you’re an art student.”

“I’m starting this fall. I took a couple of classes this summer to get some required courses out of the way. It’s taken me a while to figure out what I want to do.” He told her a little about his family’s move from Tennessee to Ohio, and him moving to New York after high school.

“So, they still live in Kentucky?”

“They do, but my dad continues to look for a good job back in Tennessee. He wants to move back to where we were living before. I think he didn’t really realize how much he’d miss his extended family. They were all really close.” He showed Grandma Smythe some pictures of Stevie and Stacey and talked a little about living in Tennessee.

“It’s nice to have family that cares. Sometimes you choose your family though.”

He nodded. “That’s how Kurt and I feel. We adopted each other. We’re brothers now.”

She smiled. “Good for you. Sometimes the family we choose is more important to us than the family we were born into.” She patted Sebastian on the arm. “The coffee here is quite good. Much better than Starbucks. I just cannot figure out the hype about that place.”

They all laughed.

“My manager is looking over here because the line is getting long. I better get back to work. It was really nice to meet you. Just let me know what size you want the painting to be and send me the photo.”

“I’ll do that, dear. It was nice to meet you too.”

Sam went back and started taking orders again.

“He’s a sweetheart,” Grandma Smythe said.

Kurt said, “I know. He’s been through a lot of rough times. He left those out, so I will as well. But he seems to finally be at peace with what he’s doing.”

She nodded. “I’m going to call for the car. I need to get going to the airport soon. Why don’t we walk back to the apartment and I’ll have the car service pick me up there.”

When they got there, they went up to the apartment until the car service texted Isabelle. Kurt managed to get the CD copied for Grandma Smythe. He and Sebastian said their goodbyes upstairs before she got back in her wheelchair.

“I’m so glad I made this trip, Sebastian. Isabelle and I will make sure that you’re taken care of from now on.” She hugged him tight.
She moved on to Kurt. “You are a sweetheart. I’m glad I got to me you, and Sam as well. You’re good for Sebastian. You take care of each other.” She hugged him as well.

Sebastian helped her into her chair. Isabelle took her down and went to the airport with her.

Once the door shut, Kurt pulled Sebastian into a hug. He ran his fingers down the back of Sebastian’s hair, almost petting him. “It’s been a whirlwind few days. What do you feel like doing? Sam won’t get home for another three hours or so.”

“I don’t even know. I like you holding me though.”

“I’m glad. Are you tired? We could go lie down and snuggle.”

Sebastian squeezed him. “That sounds nice. Let’s snuggle for a little bit, and then we can move your stuff to our room.”

“We can do that.” Kurt kissed him on the neck and squeezed him a little before he let go. “Sweats?”

“Definitely.”

Kurt went in his room and changed, and then went into what was about to become their room. He went around and lay down on the bed. “Preference?”

“Facing me, so we can kiss and look at each other while we talk.”

Kurt rolled over and was met with a kiss. He smiled. He slipped his foot in between Sebastian’s to play footsie with him. He also put his hand on Sebastian’s waist. He leaned forward and pressed feather light kisses to Sebastian’s lips, jaw, and neck. “I’m going to go to France with you.”

Sebastian launched himself towards Kurt as much as he could from the way he was laying. He kissed him.

Kurt laughed. He pulled Sebastian close, and they ended up so that Sebastian was lying on Kurt shoulder, an arm and leg wrapped around him. “Grandma Smythe said you had been making plans.”

“I was. I did. That’s what we did yesterday after we left the party. We ate, talked, planned, and went to the bank.”

“So you weren’t surprised by her gift.”

“No, but I was surprised by the birthay card itself. It was really sweet.” Sebastian moved back and got Kurt to turn on his side again. “She left the details to me to explain. The gift cards aren’t really gift cards. They’re debit cards that we can use in Europe too. You probably didn’t look that closely because you were so shocked, but they have our names on them. They’re actually linked to a joint account. I made reservations at a few places and started an itinerary.”

“I thought we were going to visit your family in Paris.”

“We are, but not for the whole five weeks. I want to see places in France that I have dreamed of visiting, but never have. And I want us to go together. You do actually want to go with me, right?”

“I do.” Kurt put his hand on the side of Sebastian’s neck. “The hesitance before wasn’t because of
“you, not at all.” Kurt kissed him. “I would have wanted to go with you, even if we were just going as friends. I was only hesitant because of the money.”

“Okay.”

“I feel like you’ve gotten really nervous about our friendship. Nothing about that has changed. Not for me. You will still tease me and I will still poke fun at you and we will laugh with each other. We’ll belly dance and mess around with our swords. We’ll watch movies and ridiculous TV shows. We’ll read and talk about the books. I’ll cook breakfast for you and you’ll make dinner for me. And we’ll be us, just like we were.”

“I think it’s just been a really stressful few days, even though I enjoyed all of it after I left the bank. And I want the same thing. I want us to be us and kiss too.” He leaned forward and kissed Kurt. “Kissing really is a lot nicer than I remembered.”

“Mmm hmm.” Kurt scooted closer. “I like snuggling with you.” He took a deep breath and relaxed. “You were so beautiful dancing today.” He ran his hand through Sebastian’s hair. “I love watching you. I want to improve even more so that we can be dance partners. I was so jealous of Miss July. I want to be the one in your arms.”

“Well, I’m certain that I have time in my schedule to put you down for private lessons.”

“Mmm. Sounds perfect. My very own gorgeous dance instructor.” He ran his hands down Sebastian’s arm until he reached his hand. He brought it up between them and played with Sebastian’s hand and fingers, tracing patterns, interlacing the fingers, slipping his fingers loose again. He brought Sebastian’s up to his mouth and kissed his knuckles. “Can you tell me about these places you’ve wanted to go?”

Sebastian smiled. He switched to French and launched into a nearly hour-long description of the places he wanted to go. Sebastian shared all of these details about the places that only someone who had done a lot of research over a long period of time could know. Kurt enjoyed listening to him talk about it as much as he enjoyed hearing the information. Kurt closed his eyes and focused on listening.

Sebastian looked over. “Am I boring you?”

“Not at all. The exact opposite. You’re being so descriptive, I closed my eyes to listen and see what you’re describing or at least try to.”

“Oh.”

“Bas, you are the most well-read person I have ever met. You literally know more about more topics than anyone I know. You are singlehandedly the most interesting person to have a conversation with that I’ve ever met. I could sit and listen to you talk for hours. I have before. I wasn’t bored then and I’m not bored now. You’re too interesting to be boring.”

He smiled and went back to what he was talking about. This time Kurt asked a few questions here and there once he had a basic understanding of what Sebastian was discussing.

Kurt said, “I still want to hear the rest of this, but do you want to move my stuff before Sam gets back? Because if you do, we need to get started.”

“Yes, I really do. It will just feel a lot more real to me, if your stuff is in here with mine.”

“Okay. Right now, I have my stuff in the bottom two drawers of the dresser. So, you can either
move all of your stuff to the top two drawers or we can put our stuff together in each drawer. I’m fine with either way, but you’ll need to start making room for my stuff.”

Sebastian kissed him, and then hopped up and started working on the dresser. Kurt went into the other room and started removing his stuff from his drawers.

He came back in with his pajamas first.

“Are we sharing or splitting the drawers?”


Kurt put them in and left to bring back something else. Once the dresser was done, they move to the hanging clothes. Sebastian was only using half the closet space, so they just carried Kurt’s hanging clothes in until they had moved them all.

“What about the totes?”

“Is there anything in them?”

“Well, you wanted to put Bruce back in. And there are some winter clothes in one of them. And the other one that has stuff in it is just stuff. Things I’ll go through again at some point.”

“I guess just leave them for now. Thanks to Isabelle, I have more clothes than Sam, so, there’s not really room at the end of the hanging clothes for the totes in my closet. But throw Bruce in the washer and dryer because tomorrow, he’s going in the ziptop bag and back in the box.”

Kurt laughed. “Come here.” Kurt wrapped his arms around Sebastian. “You’re a much better snuggler than Bruce. No comparison. But he is better than Ambien or me tossing and turning all night.”

“I am glad that he was there for you, but now that I am here to snuggle you, his services are no longer needed.” He kissed Kurt, and then stepped back out of the hug, grabbed Bruce, tossed him into the washer, and turned it on.

Kurt was standing right behind him when he turned around. “You’re adorable, but you’re not going to get upset like that about me snuggling with Sam are you? You said you wouldn’t, but now I’m wondering.”

“Only if you choose him over me just to spite me or something. If he’s upset or needs you, I would never get upset about that. You held me and comforted me when I needed it. But if we’ve gotten upset with each other over something and you stomp off and say ‘Fine, I’ll snuggle Sam.’ or something similar, that would hurt. You asked me not to withhold affection if I was upset. I’m asking the same thing. Sometimes when someone is upset, that’s the time they need physical closeness the most. Not sex, but affectionate touch.”

“Okay. But if you came home some time and I was napping snuggled up with Sam, you wouldn’t be mad.”

“Nope. I might lie down right behind you and snuggle up too.”

“Okay. What do you want me to do about the bookcase with my books and pictures and stuff on it?”
“I’m thinking of putting my desk in here, but I think we need to figure out if Sam is going to continue to come here on the weekends once school starts. So, let’s just leave the bookcase like it is now. If Sam isn’t going to come every weekend, I’ll move my desk in here and I’ll move my schoolbooks in here and you can move your pleasure reading books into our room or the living room. We’ll figure the rest of it out after we come back from France.”

“Speaking of which, I should look through my clothes and decide what to take. I want to be able to mix and match and not take a ton of stuff because from what you were describing, you want us to be able to leave Paris for days at a time.” He paused. “I know I stress out unnecessarily.”

“It’s okay. They do actually sell clothes in France.”

Kurt rolled his eyes.

“So if you get there and you’re desperate for something you forgot, you could buy a replacement. I know, not necessarily your first choice, but just go easy on the stressing out. You have the attitude to be able to pull off the ‘Why are you looking at me like my outfit is weird?’ and get away with it, whereas most of us just look ridiculous if we dress unusually.”

“‘It’s a gift. Ice-bitch face.”

Sebastian wrapped his arms around him from behind. “Nope. You’re not a bitch and your face is beautiful.”

“I can be a bitch.”

“Those are your claws coming out to defend yourself, which is perfectly acceptable. Even kittens have claws that hurt like hell if you poke at them and upset them.”

“Tell me that you did not poke kittens.”

“I have never poked a real kitten, but I have seen someone annoy one and the resulting slash marks on their hands. I actually really like cats and dogs.”

“Me too, but I’ve never had one for a pet. By the time I was getting close enough to be old enough to get one, my mom died and my dad told me that he didn’t have time to help care for one, which makes sense when he was running the shop and everything. He got called in to the shop a lot. I spent a lot of time there. That’s something I hadn’t thought about in a while. I’ll need to renew all of my certifications by my birthday next year. The renewal tests are shorter and cheaper.” He pulled his phone out of his pocket and added it to his ‘to do’ list.

“So, the stuff on your shelves in the closet still needs to be moved to our room.”

“Is there room in your closet?”

“I’m not sure. I’ll go look.” He looked in Kurt’s closet and went in the other room and rearranged some stuff and went back. “There is now.”

Kurt pulled down stacks of clothing and moved them. Sebastian just stood back and let Kurt do it himself since it seemed to have a very specific organization to it. Once he was done, he had Sebastian help him strip the bed and throw the bed linens into the washer. Sebastian put Bruce into the dryer and turned it on.

[Image of clothes]
“We should probably actually start to make dinner,” Kurt said. He headed into the kitchen.

Sebastian followed him. Kurt opened the cabinet and pulled out a box of pasta. Sebastian put his hands on either side, pinning Kurt in place and causing him to laugh. He turned in the small space and put his arms around Sebastian right above the waist and pulled him flush against him, startling Sebastian a bit.

“I’m all for this.” He kissed him on the cheek. “But let’s get the water boiling.” He ran he bent his fingers and just barely used his nails to run up and down Sebastian’s back. “And then get back to whatever you were about to do.” Kurt let go of him and moved his right hand so he could get to the pots and started two pots of water boiling, and then slipped right back to where he had been, wrapped his arms back around Sebastian, and pulled him flush against him again. “So, now what?”

Sebastian pressed his lips to Kurt’s and moved his right hand to the back of Kurt’s neck and slipped his fingers into his hair. He licked his way into Kurt’s mouth and they began exploring each other’s mouths again. They were so caught up in what they were doing, they didn’t hear Sam unlock the door and open it, but they did hear it when the door shut. Sebastian stepped back.

“Well, that’s new. It’s about time.”

“Surprise, we’re dating,” Kurt said.

Sam laughed. “Yeah, I got that part when his tongue was in your mouth.”

“That wasn’t exactly how I had intended to tell you, but at least you didn’t make retching noises or scream something at us.”

“Yeah, well that would mean that I’m not a jerk. Plus, I’ve been rooting for the two of you for ages. I just kept it to myself until you two were ready to talk about it yourselves. So, when did you talk about it?”

Sebastian answered, “Thursday.”

Kurt said, “I have other news. Guess what?”

“What?”

“Adam’s show got picked up to open on the West End.”

“I know. He told me the other day. That’s awesome. I was really happy for him.”

“I didn’t know he had told you.”

“Yeah, he and I still talk. I know you two write him, but it’s just so much easier for me to talk. I connect to the school WiFi and sometimes we Skype on my lunch break when he’s having dinner.”

“That’s cool. What I hadn’t told Sebastian yet was that he’s seeing someone. His name is Marcus and he’s a friend of Elliott’s. He was here going to NYU. I met him when he was with Elliott one day and several other times, but I never hung out with him on my own. He’s a nice guy. And he got a small part on the West End when he went back to London in May after he graduated.”

Sebastian said, “I’m glad for Adam.”

Kurt moved to put the pasta in one pot and chicken strips in the other. He set the timer. He pulled out the spinach, mushroom, and onions to prep them. The timer on the washer went off.
“Can you move those to the dryer, Sam?”

“Sure.” He opened the laundry closet and opened the dryer. “Bruce is in the dryer.”

“Just put him on top.”

Sam plopped him on top, and then stuffed the sheets and blanket into the dryer and turned it on. He came back into the kitchen to find the other two chopping stuff for dinner.

“Need any help?”

“It shouldn’t be much longer. You can get drinks and silverware.”

Ten minutes later, they were all sitting down and eating.

“So how did Grandma Smythe end up in New York this weekend?”

“That’s a story for Sebastian to tell,” Kurt said.

“I’ll tell you after we eat. It’s pretty long and I’d rather eat my food hot.”

After they finished eating, Kurt cleared the table and washed the dishes, giving Sebastian the time he needed to explain what had happened. He sat back down at the table once he had finished the clean up. Sebastian also told him about their trip to France.

“You can still stay here between when your classes end and school starts again,” Sebastian said.

“I might take Lexi to Kentucky or the east edge of Ohio or something so that she can meet my family. I’m not sure yet. Things are going well now and if they continue to, then we will have been dating for about two months by then. But I might come back here too. I’m not sure yet. I can move into the dorm four days before classes start.”

“Whatever you decide is fine. Have you figured what you’re going to do about work?”

“I haven’t found anything that pays as well as what I’m making here, but I’m still looking. It will get a lot more complicated once it starts to snow. Pick up trucks and snow are not a good mix and I’ll probably have to take the train when there’s a lot of snow predicted.”

“That’s true,” Kurt said.

The dryer buzzed. “I’ll get that.” Kurt left and remade the bed before he came back.

The other two were looking through the choices on Netflix. Kurt turned the lamp off and plopped down in between them. “Have you ever considered an ottoman?”

“I have actually been thinking about it. I liked the open space visually, but when considering comfort, I’m thinking that having one would make watching stuff more comfortable.”

They finally settled on an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation.*

When it came time to get ready for bed, Kurt realized that they hadn’t discussed the issue of the bathroom. He let Sam go first as usual, since he didn’t take as long and he had to get up before Kurt. Sam got in bed and Kurt took his place in the bathroom. When he came out, he realized that in his tiredness, he didn’t bring any clothes with him. He was glad that it was already dark in the
room when he came out of the bathroom. Sam had already fallen asleep.

Kurt made his way through the room quietly and then knocked twice before he opened the other bedroom door. He wasn’t as lucky this time and Sebastian still had the side table light on waiting for him. He shut the door behind him.

Sebastian wolf whistled quietly and winked at him. “Nice towel. I think this might be my favorite look so far.”

Kurt opened the dresser, took out what he needed, and stepped into the bathroom. He closed the door and dressed. He quietly took his towel back to the other bathroom and brought his phone, dirty clothes, and toothbrush back. He tossed his clothes into his laundry basket, went back into the bathroom, and brushed his teeth. He left his toothbrush on the sink. Sebastian waited until Kurt sat down on the bed to turn the light off. As soon as Kurt lay down, he scooted over and snuggled up to Sebastian.

“We didn’t think about the bathroom earlier.”

“Let’s just leave it until after we come back.”

“Okay.” Kurt reached up and ran his fingers through Sebastian’s hair and played with it for a few minutes, and then he slid his hand to the back of Sebastian’s neck and gently drew him forward into a passionate kiss, leaving them both breathless.

Kurt woke up to small kisses trailing up his neck toward his ear. “Mmm.”

“You like that?”

“Very much.”

Sebastian redirected the kisses down Kurt’s jaw line, and then to his lips. He ended the kissing with a peck to Kurt’s nose, which made him smile. “We’re picking Elliott up at 8:00, right?”

“Leave at 8:00.”

“Mmm. Longer to kiss you.” He ran his hands through Kurt’s hair. “I like the highlights or whatever that you had done this last time.”

“Thanks. I’m actually glad I slipped in and got it done Wednesday. Now, it will look good on my passport photos, which we’re going somewhere to have done today, right?”

“We are, but not until after we get back. We can shower again before we go out to have those done. Our to-do list is pretty long today.”

“Should we get up and get started then? I want to do yoga this morning. I skipped yesterday.”

“One more kiss.”

“I know what I want to try. And yes, kiss me.”

Sebastian smiled and they kissed before they got up.

“What is it that you want to try?”
“Couples yoga. It looks like a lot of fun.”

“We’ll give it a try sometime.”

“He said to pull down by the doors on the east end of the building.”

Kurt said, “Got it.” He drove around the building and saw Elliott standing outside.

They both got out and walked up to where Elliott had boxes stacked. They moved the boxes to the back of the truck. Elliott ran up and looked through the room carefully one last time, and then headed down to turn his key in. He was back about 15 minutes later. He slid into the passenger seat next to Sebastian. He gave directions on how to get to the highway to head to New Jersey.

He opened it up. “I took my bed and my other big furniture back the week I was couch surfing. I’m just going to stay in Paramus and take the train in like I did when I was in high school. It’s like an hour ride, but it’s just too much to pay rent while I look for a job. Once I get something, I’ll look for a place here again. For now, I’m going to find take an evening job I found and start to save up money. That way, I can still go to interviews and auditions maybe.”

Kurt focused on the roads for a while until they got to a point where it was mostly just following along behind the rest of the vehicles. “Sebastian’s grandma, well great grandma is paying for the two of us to go to France, so we won’t be around until about the time school starts.”

“That’s cool, like really cool.”

“I’ve only been back home once in the four years I’ve been here, so I’m excited.”

“And of course, I am too. I’ve wanted to go since forever. I’m not sure if I ever said anything, but my grandparents were from France. I don’t know anything about them or their side of the family. I’m hoping to learn something about them while I’m there. For all I know, I have second cousins there.”

“You hadn’t told me, but that’s cool that you might be able to find out something about your mom’s side of the family.”

“I’m not getting my hopes up, but I will be pleasantly surprised if I do. My dad never talked about them. So, I know nothing about them.”

Elliott nudged Sebastian in the shoulder. “I heard congratulations were in order. Kurt told me Friday. It’s about time, you know.”

“We weren’t ready, but it was worth the wait. We’re both in a good place now.”

Kurt started a new topic, “Where are you going to be working?”

Fifteen minutes later, they pulled up to Elliott’s mom’s house.

“That’s not a bad drive at all. I know we didn’t have much traffic because it’s Sunday morning, but you’re closer than Sam is.”

They got out and helped Elliott carry his stuff inside. They met Elliott’s mom on their way in with the first boxes. Once they had unloaded everything, they hugged. Sebastian and Kurt headed back towards the apartment.
When they got back in the truck, Sebastian scooted to the center. He put his hand on Kurt’s leg. He waited to say anything until Kurt was back out on the highway. “I know you’re feeling torn. I don’t have an answer for you, but he’s not that far away. An hour train ride into the city isn’t much different than what you were doing every day from Bushwick for two years. It’s not ideal commute-wise, but it is free.”

“I know. It’s more than just him not living here. He’s super talented. He’s a better performer than I am. Don’t argue. I’m not undervaluing myself. He has a more desirable vibe or more charisma or something. It’s hard to explain unless you’ve seen him perform live. He just draws the audience in. He’s also every bit as good of a designer and tailor as I am. Him going back to New Jersey is like this triple let down. He’s farther away. I don’t get to work with him anymore. And he graduated not quite three months ago and has no prospects for a job other than the type he could have gotten without going to college. I’m sad for him. He put in the work. Then my thoughts shift to Rachel, who has basically just been handed shot after shot. I’m not saying she isn’t good, but Elliott is better. And then there’s Mercedes who got her big shot through a series of events that happened because Sam posted a video of her singing on YouTube. And Finn died before he ever got a chance to do what he wanted. Sometimes it’s just hard. I want good things to happen to the people I care about. I don’t want Elliott’s talents to fade into the nothingness as he waits tables in Paramus.”

“I hope they don’t. If he’s a charismatic as you say, maybe he should try on of those TV shows.”

“Maybe. Maybe Mercedes could pull some strings somehow and get him seen by someone.”

“What if we go ahead to Costco and Ikea before we go home?”

“Ikea?”

“I think I really do want to get an ottoman. It would be so cozy to snuggle up with you and watch movies, so I looked them up again. I think I’ve found the one I want to get, but I want to go see it in person first.”

“Allright. Ikea, then Costco. But you’re buying us lunch at Ikea for dragging me out shopping dressed like this.”

“Kurt, you’re gorgeous. Your clothes look like most every other college student out shopping on a Sunday morning.”

“You’ve called me that more than once. Are you teasing me with that nickname or being ironic or whatever?”

“No, not at all. I really do think you’re gorgeous.”

Kurt didn’t say anything.

Sebastian saw a tear escape and Kurt wiped his eyes.

“Hey, are you okay? What upset you?”

“Nothing. They’re happy tears. I’m fine. Better than fine. Tell me more about *Le Château de Fontainebleau.”*
Sebastian slid out on the driver’s side following Kurt. Kurt waited for him to shut the door so he could lock it. Before Kurt turned to go inside, Sebastian wrapped his arms around Kurt’s waist and stepped toward him. “Before we go inside, I need you to hear what I have to say, okay?”

“Okay.” He put his hands on Sebastian’s chest.

“I think you’re gorgeous. I am beyond thrilled that we are together. I will brag to anyone that I have the most amazing boyfriend. I am proud to be your boyfriend. And unless you are opposed to it, I plan to be openly affectionate with you, starting now.”

Kurt nodded slightly, and he didn’t push Sebastian back, so Sebastian leaned forward just enough to press a chaste kiss to Kurt’s lips, which Kurt returned. Sebastian dropped one hand from Kurt’s waist and turned for them to walk into the store. Kurt wrapped his arm around Sebastian’s waist as well.

“Now, that’s better. Let’s go see if the ottoman I saw meets the Kurt Hummel interior design standards.”

Kurt hip checked him. “I already said I liked what you had done with the apartment.”

“But now it’s our apartment and the ottoman is for us.” He kissed him on the cheek.

“Let’s eat lunch before we go searching for the ottoman.”

“Sure.” He turned to the left as they went in. “Pick what you want and I’ll go get it while you get us a table.”

Kurt chose and went to get a table. Sebastian came back with their food. He sat down next to Kurt and managed to hook his food around Kurt’s ankle. He offered Kurt a bite of what he had ordered, and then fed it to him rather than give him the fork.

“I can feed myself, you know.”

“Of course, I know, but that was more fun.”

Kurt picked up a bite of his and fed it to Sebastian. “You’re right. It is fun.”

They finished eating and went looking for the ottoman. They consulted the map and went to where they were on display.

“I liked this cover,” Sebastian showed him one that was just a tad more blue than pure turquoise, and it was also a somewhat muted tone.

“That’s actually really nice. That color would make a great accent color for the living room, kitchen, and dining room. With the yellow walls and the dark brown furniture, this color is a nice splash of color. And it would look good with the paintings and the rug.”

“Sold.” Sebastian snapped a picture of the product number for the ottoman with the correct cover color. “I did like the ones that open and can be used to store things, but I think this one will be easier to pick up and move since it has short legs instead of sitting nearly flush to the floor. The description also said that the cover is machine washable.”

“Stylish and practical.” He took Sebastian’s hand. “How about some throw pillows?”

“I could be convinced.”
“Is that so?” Kurt led them through the path to the pillows. He looked through the covers as well. “I don’t think any of these will look good, but we could get four of these for $10 and I can make covers for them.”

Sebastian reached in and grabbed two and handed them to Kurt and picked up two more. They continued on their journey to the warehouse portion of the store. Sebastian handed Kurt his two pillows, grabbed a cart, put the two boxes the ottoman came in on it, and headed for the cash registers.

While they waited in line, Sebastian managed to position Kurt in front of him. He wrapped his arms around him and propped his chin on Kurt’s shoulder.

“Comfy?”

“Very.” Sebastian squeezed him just a little and kissed the side of his neck.

“I’ll put the groceries away while you make yourself up for your photo. I’ll jump in the shower as soon as I’m done.”

Twenty minutes later, Kurt was ready to go. Sebastian came out a few minutes later. He wolf whistled at Kurt.

“That will take some getting used to.”

Sebastian walked straight up to him and kissed him. “Ready? It shouldn’t take too long and we’ll come back and put the ottoman together.”

“How did you ever get that sofa together by yourself?”

“I didn’t. I paid to have the furniture delivered and chose the delivery plus assembly option, just for the sofa though. I figured I could get the rest of it done eventually.”

“Well, hats off to you for your infinite patience in doing it alone.” He pecked him on the lips.

“It’s a lot more fun doing it with you. The delivery driver didn’t kiss me.”

Kurt laughed. “You obviously didn’t choose the delivery plus assembly plus kisses option.”

Sebastian offered his hand and pulled Kurt to standing and into his arms. “I didn’t want to kiss him anyway. But I do want to kiss you.” He stepped to his right. “Let’s try this out.” He sat down and patted the sofa. He put his feet and legs up on the ottoman.

Kurt sat down next to him and stretched his legs out next to Sebastian’s and then plopped his right leg over Sebastian’s left leg and started to play footsie with him. Sebastian lifted his arm and let Kurt snuggle into his side, and then put his arm around Kurt’s shoulders and kissed his temple.

“I like it. How about you?”

“Me too. We can read together this way too instead of lying on opposite ends of the sectional like we used to. I just remembered. We have to get our plane tickets. You have to have yours with you tomorrow in order to get an expedited passport.”
“We need your laptop.”

“You’ll have to move your leg.”

He harrumphed. “Where’s your magic wand to enchant it to come in here on its own so I don’t have to move?”

Sebastian laughed. “It was at Olivander’s for repairs. I didn’t manage to get back there to pick it up before I got sent here.”

“Excuses, excuses.” He kissed Sebastian, and then moved his leg.

He came back with his laptop. “If we leave Friday when you get off, we can sleep on the flight over.”

“I can try. You know that I’m not the best at sleeping. But if I get to snuggle you, I might be able to.” He put his hand along the back of Sebastian’s neck and began running his fingers through his hair, alternating with petting his hair.

“I like that a lot, just so you know. It’s very relaxing.”

“Are there tickets still available for Friday night? Did you tell anyone that we’re coming? Or are you planning on knocking on your grandmère’s door and saying ‘Surprise!’ when we get there?”

“She wouldn’t care, but I will let her know. Here’s one 10:40pm departure and arrives at noon on Saturday.”

“How long is the flight?”

“Less than 8 hours. The times are stated in local time. Here’s a return flight that leaves at 6:55pm and arrives 9:45pm.”

“That sounds fine to me. That way we can get the maximum time there.”

Kurt was standing and staring at his half of the closet. “I need to get some more waterproofing spray tomorrow. Maybe I’ll have time to grab some after we leave the passport office.” He added it to his list on his phone. He checked the weather forecast for Paris to get an idea of what to pack.

“Let’s make our itinerary. We can pack later in the week. The sooner we book places to stay, the less it will be. Walking into a hotel and asking for a room always costs more.” Sebastian stepped between Kurt and the closet. “You’re getting really tense. I know you struggle with everything being right, but everything will be right if you’re there with me. Shoe spray, shampoo, clothes, shoes, and anything else you could possibly need can be bought. But it’s not going to be as much fun if you’re stressed out. The places we go, the things we see, and the things we do will be the same whether you are wearing sweatpants and an undershirt or a $1000 designer outfit straight from the vault. I want to go with you and have fun.”

Kurt wrapped his arms around Sebastian’s neck. “You’re right. You’re right. I’ll remember that when I work on the clothes later. The important part is to enjoy ourselves. Once all of the laundry is dry, I’ll work on mix and match coordination, taking as few things as possible to give the widest variety in outfits.”

Sebastian kissed up Kurt’s neck to his ear. “We’d have more room in the luggage for clothes, if we
leave the pajamas behind.”

“Sebastian!”

“Just offering helpful space-saving packing tips.”
Sebastian and Kurt headed for the passport office to Kurt’s appointment. They made sure that they had the documents, money order, and photographs that Kurt needed and stopped by Kinko’s to print the plane tickets. They both took books with them to read during the long wait they were sure to endure. In the end, Kurt had to reschedule his counseling session and barely made it to work by 2:00.

On the way home, Sebastian stopped by a store that sold hiking, camping, and travel gear. He picked out a few rolling backpacks and looked at all of the features and confirmed that they would be allowed as carry-ons by fitting them into a replica of the baggage allowance boxes at the airport. He tried on the three that fit his criteria. He narrowed it down to two and re-examined their features. He looked through the available colors and chose pine green and Prussian blue. He also picked out a couple of luggage cubes to make packing easier. He looked through the waterproofing sprays and chose one for leather like Kurt had mentioned that he needed. He also picked up two high-quality folding umbrellas and four pairs of good hiking socks for each of them.

Once he got home with everything, he put their dinner in the Crockpot. He did all of his laundry so Kurt would have the washer and dryer free to do his that evening. Once he had everything settled, he turned some instrumental music on and sat down with his laptop to continue working on their itinerary.

When he heard Kurt put his key in the door, he set his laptop to the side and got up. Kurt noticed him standing near the sofa when he came in. He slipped his shoes off and put his bag on top of the cabinet. Sebastian closed the distance between them so quickly that he made Kurt laugh. Kurt wrapped his arms around Sebastian’s neck. Sebastian put his arms around Kurt’s torso and spun him around. Kurt tipped his head back and bent his knees like he had seen the girls be taught to do. Sebastian put him back down, but neither of them let go. Sebastian kissed him gently.

“Care to dance?”

“I’d love to.”

They danced around the living room for a few minutes. Sebastian slowly guided them to Sam’s room. Right before they got to the door, he let go and ushered Kurt into the room.

“I went shopping for some luggage that will work for our trip. I also bought the shoe spray you wanted and some hiking socks for both of us to cut down on the risk of blisters.”

“Thank you.”

“So, this blue and gray one is yours and that obviously leaves the green and black one for me. I bought each of us a storage cube to help with packing. If they aren’t useful, I can take them back. These are the largest carry-ons allowed. I’d like us to be able to put everything we’re taking in them so that we’re free to move from place to place without having to go back to wherever we stayed overnight to reclaim our luggage before we can leave.”

“That makes sense.”

“It would also be best to take things that can be washed and dried, at least everything but the shirts because those can be ironed dry if they don’t dry while hanging up overnight. There won’t
necessarily be jumbo-sized washers available. We can do one load every 3-4 days and just rewear the clothes.” Sebastian stepped behind Kurt and wrapped his arms around him and propped his chin on Kurt’s shoulder. “I know what I am asking goes against every fiber in your fashionable being, but having the ability to easily carry everything we’re taking will make this a lot more fun in the long run. I was serious when I said that I would go with you even if you wear an undershirt and sweats every day. I don’t want to be with you because of the way you dress. I want to be with you because you’re you.” Sebastian stopped talking when Kurt reached up to wipe his eyes. He rotated them so they were facing each other. “You started to tear up before, and then changed the subjects back to castles. Please tell me why you’re crying.”

“I’m just struggling between knowing that you haven’t lied to me since I moved in and hearing you say things that are what I always wanted someone to say to me. It’s an internal fight between listening to the din and roar of the past and accepting the genuinely sweet things you keep saying to me. It feels surreal. You holding me helps keep me grounded. I’m sorry. I’m still a mess. I thought I was enough better not to pull you down.” He tried to step back out of Sebastian’s reach.

Sebastian didn’t grab for him, but said, “Stay.” He stepped forward to match half the distance that Kurt had stepped back. “I came into this knowing that you would struggle to accept my affection. If I’m coming on too strong, just tell me. I’m a patient man.”

Kurt nodded. “I’m sorry.”

“There’s nothing for you to be sorry for. I just need you to tell me because, as much as I can read your body language a lot of the time, I can’t read your mind.”

“I want to be everything. I’ve been holding so much of me inside. I’m afraid to let it out. I’m too much. I’m never enough. I’m burning hot and I’m ice cold. I felt everything too much. I became numb. I was fearless and now I’m afraid. Are you sure you want me?”

“Can I hold you?” He held his arms open.

Kurt closed the distance and stepped into Sebastian’s arms.

“Think about this. Listen carefully, okay?”

“Mmm hmm.”

“Thursday evening after we came back, what did I do?”

“You offered to order dinner and I counter-offered with a sandwich made by me. You wanted to talk. We showered, I cooked, we ate, and then we talked.”

“Right. We came back and I wanted to talk to you about wanting us to be boyfriends.”

“Yes.”

“I could have come in and told you that I was going to go out and to not wait up for me.”

“You could have.”

“I had remained celibate for four years. I could have gone out and gotten laid multiple times. I don’t know how many times a guy can have sex in six hours, but I could have found out Thursday night and come back home Friday morning and slept for four hours before going to visit with Grandma at Isabelle’s.”
“Mmm hmm.”

Sebastian took a half-step back, preventing Kurt from being able lean on him and causing Kurt turn his head and look at him. “But I don’t want any of those other guys. I want you.”

“I want to believe that. I desperately want to believe that.”

“And when I figure out how many times a guy can make love in one night, I want to find out with you. If you want me too, I will be here and persevere through your doubts and help you figure out how to patch up the places where the love I give you is still leaking out so that you don’t feel unloved ever again.”

“You love me?”

“Yes, very much. I know you’ve got scars and maybe even some leftover open wounds hidden someplace you haven’t noticed yet. Let me love you, please. Can you let me that close to you? Can you let yourself trust me to never hurt you intentionally?”

“I want to. Don’t give up, please? What you did just now was perfect. I feel safe. You’re like this hearth I’m drawn to where there’s all this warmth, but I’m afraid of being burned.”

“I know you are. I know that you don’t want to talk about Blaine and neither do I, but I want to ask you something.”

“Okay.”

Sebastian pushed the luggage back and made room for them to sit on the side of the bed. He kept hold of Kurt’s hand. “I know that for along time you believed that he loved you, but based on what little I heard of what you said to him at his apartment, I’m not sure that you believe that anymore.”

“I don’t. I have realized that his ‘I love you’ meant ‘I love how much you love me’. It was a verbal way to get me to respond and tell him that I loved him and to offer up some type of ‘supply’ is what it’s called. Supplying him with an endless amount of praise or ask him to brag about himself in a round about way. Or even to supply him with undue amounts of empathy or sympathy over something minor. If I had a hard day, his was harder and he wanted me to be supportive of his harder day when he would say something ridiculous like Miss July called him out of no reason and that was literally the only thing that had gone wrong. And my hard day was getting stiffed for 4 hours of my shift at the diner, while being yelled by Gunther for sending too many meals back to be fixed for some dumb reason while wasting a lot of food. I didn’t tell the tourists to order their hamburger medium and then send it back because it was cooked medium, not well like they had actually wanted it. And then I’d come home and want to eat, only to find that nothing I had previously bought was in the refrigerator. I’m the king of egg sandwiches because they’re cheap and most of the time there would at least be some bread and a few eggs in the fridge since Rachel was in vegan mode at the time and Santana didn’t bother to cook. ‘You know I love you, Kurt, but quit being such a bitch and get off your high horse. It was just some leftovers from two days ago.’ That and things like our cereal. Rachel would start statements with, ‘You know I love you, Kurt, BUT …’ followed by some unreasonable request like ‘I need you to let me use the shower first every morning because I need longer to get ready.’ despite the fact that my first class was before hers. ‘I love you, Kurt, but do you have to make such a spectacle of yourself?’ from my dad. ‘I love you’ seemed to morph into ‘I love what you can do for me.’ Or ‘I know you love me so bend over backwards to do this thing for me.’ Or ‘I love you, so don’t embarrass me.’”

“So, hearing ‘I love you’ eventually just caused you to wait to be reprimanded or belittled or have a request or a demand issued?”
“Pretty much, yes.”

“That’s not how love is supposed to work.”

“I know, and I knew. But figuring out that something is counterfeit is a whole lot easier when you’re an expert in the real thing. If all you’ve ever seen is other counterfeits being treated like the real thing, it’s really hard to know you don’t have the real thing, especially when everyone one around you continues to tell you how amazing your real thing is.”

“You’re right. You’re absolutely right. Forgery detectors do not study other forgeries. Counterfeit experts spend their time knowing the real thing so well that they can spot a minute difference like rest of us can see the differences between a rock and a blade of grass. I grew up loved. My maman loved me. My grandparents loved me. My family and my grandmère still love me. I am not saying that to brag. I’m saying it to agree with you – that having grown up being loved I KNOW that what you’ve had was counterfeit love.”

“I want the real thing. No more fakes or flattering manipulation.”

Sebastian slid down off the bed and knelt between Kurt’s knees. He propped his forearms on Kurt’s legs, and put his hands on Kurt’s waist. He looked him directly in the eyes. “You already have it. It’s yours. The question is whether you can accept it.”

Kurt ran his hands along Sebastian’s upper arms. “I want to.”

“We can go as slow as you want. I’m not in a hurry.”

“That …”

“What? Just tell me, please.”

“That makes me wonder whether you actually find me attractive. Do you not want me that way?”

“Were you not listening earlier? I said that when I find out how many times a guy…”

“Right. So, you do, or at least you say you do.”

“I feel like we’re going in circles.”

“I feel like I’m reliving two different scenes superimposed on each other in this weird way and what I really want to do is kiss you senseless.”

“Well, I’m all for that.” He pressed his lips together and winked at Kurt.

“There’s so much internal conflict between being prudent and going slow and my desire to take you in the other room and undress you and kiss you everywhere.”

“I get to undress you too and kiss you everywhere too, right?”

Kurt rolled his eyes.

“Come with me.” Sebastian stood up and took Kurt’s hand and led him to the other room.

“We’re going to put this misunderstanding of my intentions and feelings to rest.” He shut the door and backed Kurt up against it without touching him anywhere. “Can I show you? You’re free to say
‘yes’ or ‘no’ or even ‘later.’”

“Yes.”

Sebastian reached for Kurt’s shirt and started to unbutton the top button. “Okay?”

Kurt nodded.

Sebastian continued. He pulled it untucked and unbuttoned it the rest of the way. He looked at Kurt, who nodded, and then he put his hands on Kurt’s sides and gently caressed his skin, just moving his thumbs. He leaned forward and lightly pressed his forehead to Kurt’s. “What if I tell you in French? Then there can’t be any confusion about what I mean. My ‘I love you’ will never mean ‘I’m trying to manipulate you.’ It will never be followed by a scathing criticism of something about you or something you did or didn’t do. Now, I can’t guarantee that my ‘I love you.’ won’t be followed by potentially lewd remarks of how utterly sexy I find you and how much I want to get you in bed and have my way with you.”

Kurt laughed.

“My deep attraction to you is no laughing matter though. I might be utterly annoying with how affectionate I am. I might drive you nuts by messing your hair up and wrinkling your clothes by hugging you. When you ask me which outfit to wear while wearing only your towel and I may steal it from you and suggest that you wear the most perfect suit – the one you were born wearing. You’re eyes may have muscle strain from the number of times you roll them because I’ve said something lewd or suggestive again as an answer to a regular question. But you will never, ever have to wonder just how much I’m attracted to you and how much I love you.”

“Kiss me? Show me?”

Sebastian didn’t need to be asked twice. He pressed his lips to Kurt’s and kissed him. Kurt joined in, immediately kissing him back. Sebastian pulled him closer rather than pushing him back into the door and trapping him. Instead of wrapping his arms around Sebastian’s neck or holding on to his shoulders or arms, Kurt moved his hands in between them and began unbuttoning Sebastian’s shirt. Once he had it open, he put his arms around him, his elbows near Sebastian’s waist and his hands between his shoulder blades, lightly caressing his back.

“I can’t promise to stop rolling my eyes if you say things that are complimentary or lewd, but don’t let that discourage you because if you do it frequently and everywhere, I will know that it’s real and not just a ploy to get me to provide some type of sexual gratification for you.”

Sebastian kissed up his neck. “Oh, I’m not in favor of one-way ‘sexual gratification’, as you put it. I want to be the one satisfying you. Any time. In every way. I want to be your fantasy fulfiller.”

“Well, that’s remarkably easy, yet seemingly impossible to find in the real world.”

“Do tell.” Sebastian licked the edge of Kurt’s ear, causing Kurt to get goosebumps and shiver a little.

“I want you to genuinely care about me and still pay attention to me now that we’re together. I don’t want this to have been an 8-month lead up to me putting 100% of myself into this, and then end up being taken for granted and being turned into your stay-at-home boyfriend while you go out on the town in your newfound freedom. You’ve just been set free and I don’t want to be the guy you resent because you didn’t get to enjoy the wild college years. I can’t be the guy who stays home while you go out and flirt and party it up, leading guys on or actually doing things with them.
I want to be your first choice and the choice that you make every time you’re presented with another choice – a man that is more something, like better looking, has more money or more secure career potential.” Kurt paused and took a deep breath. “I want a man who wouldn’t consider giving up what we have for what could be because what we have is too amazing to consider giving up.” Kurt kissed Sebastian gently. “My fantasy is that I am enough for someone. I want someone to love me enough to look temptation in the eye, reject temptation, and walk away. And I want my someone to know for certain that I will do the very same thing. In my fantasy, my someone never frets over me having male friends because he knows that he’s he only one I love and want.”

“Mutual concern, respect, affection, love, and trust.” Sebastian kissed him. “I can do that.”

“The thing is I really think you can too, but I’m still sort of afraid of just how much I want you. I was perfectly happy with us being best friends. I really was. And I had been in that position before – having someone who was a friend tell me that he felt more than friendly feelings towards me. But when we came in here and we kissed. I’ve never wanted anyone the way I do you, Bas. It was like this dam broke open when we kissed.”

“You mean Adam.”

“Yes. But the cascade of desire didn’t happen that time. I knew that he would be faithful and loyal, and I’m sure that he would have been a kind and giving lover and partner, and I was flattered, and maybe with time and maybe if I had been in a different place emotionally that would have been different. But with you … “ He pressed forward and kissed Sebastian, who kissed back enthusiastically. “You make me feel things I’ve never felt. Things always sparked between us. Even back when we sniped at each other, there was always a spark.”

“When your eyes would flash with fire too. It’s still in there. And I know it’s scary for you to let that out. Too many people have tried to put it out, and over time, they began to be more effective. The closer you let them get to you, the better their ability to dampen it. I don’t want that. I want us to burn together.”

Kurt stepped closer and used his position and leverage to turn Sebastian and pushed him against the door. He slipped Sebastian’s shirt off his shoulders and began to kiss from his shoulder to his neck. “Okay?” he asked as he kissed up his neck toward his ear.

“Yes.” He slipped his hands free, and laid the shirt on the top of the dresser. Kurt shifted and put his shirt there as well. He ran his hands down Sebastian’s arms. “Touch me, please. I’ve never wanted…”

Sebastian quieted him with a kiss. He reached around Kurt and ran his hands down Kurt’s back. Kurt moaned and licked at Sebastian’s lower lip and they kissed until they needed to catch their breath. Even then, Sebastian leaned in and kissed down Kurt’s neck and continued to caress him. Kurt moved his hand up Sebastian’s shoulder and neck, and then around to the back of his neck and ran his fingers through Sebastian’s hair. He pulled very gently to get Sebastian to move the kissing back to his lips. When they broke for air again, Kurt kissed up his jaw line.

“Is this what you meant by working up to it?”

“Absolutely.”

“I like this.” Kurt licked the outer edge of his earlobe. “A lot.”
“Good to know.” Sebastian giggled quietly as Kurt’s kissing and licking hit a ticklish spot. “Me too.” He moved his hands around to the front and put them on Kurt’s shoulders. He slowly drew them down Kurt’s torso towards his waist. When his fingertips brushed over Kurt’s chest, Kurt’s breath caught.

“Oh, Bas. Do that again.”

He ran his fingers across Kurt’s chest again, causing Kurt’s breath to hitch again. “If you’re okay with it, we could move this to the bed and I could reach you a lot easier than I can against the door. We can keep the rest of our clothes on and keep kissing.”

“Mmm hmm. Okay.” Kurt started walking backwards and then sideways towards the bed without letting go of Sebastian. When they were next to the bed, Kurt let go and climbed across to the middle and lay back.

Sebastian crawled across the bed and straddled Kurt and sat down. He ran his hands down Kurt’s arms first, one and a time, caressing him alternating with lightly massaging his arm, followed by kissing the area he had just been touching while he moved his hands down. “Still yes?”

“Very much so. That feels amazing.”

“So, when you said ‘I’ve never wanted’, what were you referring to?”

“I’ve never let myself be touched like this. I’ve never wanted anyone to touch me like this. Don’t stop, please.”

Sebastian’s face showed that he didn’t understand, but he went back to what he was doing. “I won’t stop unless you want me to. I think I’m addicted already.” He leaned forward and kissed him. “You, my gorgeous boyfriend, are addictive.”

Kurt’s mind cleared briefly when Sebastian’s hands had stilled momentarily. “I smelled food when I came in. It’s not turning to charcoal is it?”

“It’s in the Crockpot. We’re fine.” He started on Kurt’s other arm. Once he got to his wrist, he turned Kurt’s arm over and started kissing his way back up. When he got close to the top, he moved to kissing down Kurt’s side and back up. He kissed across his chest, licking now and again. Kurt arched up and nearly cried out. He stopped himself. “I’m sorry.”

“For what? The fact that you like this so much is hot, like really hot. Make all the noises you want. They’re hot too.” Sebastian licked him and he arched up again.

“Bas!” was barely more than a strangled moan. “I never knew. Don’t stop. No, wait.”

Sebastian stopped immediately. He pecked Kurt on the lips. “Too much?”

“No. It’s amazing and wonderful. But as much as I don’t want to stop, we need to eat go back to what we were doing.” He was breathing hard still. “You’re not mad are you?”

“Not at all.”

Kurt pushed rose up and pecked Sebastian on the lips. “Mon abri.”

Sebastian looked at Kurt not understanding what he meant at first, and then he smiled. ‘I’ll Cover You.””
Kurt nodded. “Except, I’m no one’s queen.”

“Of course not, *mon feu.*” He was still propping his weight on his elbows and pushed up to the downward dog pose and stretched his back.

“Very sexy. How about a modified dolphin pose?”

He lifted his head and moved his hands forward a bit and lowered himself almost down to his elbows and kissed Kurt. “Like that?”

“Exactly like that. Dolphin plank pose?”

He scooted his feet back and lay down flat on Kurt.

“Hmm. Promising, but too much for now. I won’t want to get up and do what needs done.” He ran his hands up Sebastian’s sides. “Lie next to me on your side?”

“Of course.”

Kurt took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I’m going to commit to this with you. Earlier you said that you could do mutual concern, respect, affection, love, and trust. You mean it, right?”

“Yes.”

“Alright. I have one thing to ask of you. If you ever decide that you don’t want to be with me anymore, please be humane enough to just tell me. If you ever meet someone else that makes you seriously question your ability to remain faithful to me, tell me. I don’t expect you to not have or make friends. I’m not controlling. I won’t ask you who you were with and what you were doing like I’m your parole officer. But if one of your friends ever questions your availability, please don’t let people think you’re single.”

“I wouldn’t. You’ll do the same, right?”

“Yes. Although, no one ever really flirts with me, so I don’t see it being a big problem.”

“Guys aren’t uninterested. They’re too intimidated to flirt with you.”

“The ice king routine?”

“Yep. The ice castle walls are insurmountable.”

“Not completely obviously.” He ran his hand down the side of Sebastian’s face.

Sebastian reached up and caught Kurt’s hand and kissed his palm, and then interlaced their fingers. “You put the moat bridge down for me, which I am quite thrilled about.” He scooted forward and kissed Kurt. “And inside the ice castle there’s a really nice igloo with the fire burning bright.”

“Enough with the analogies. We do need to get up and go eat and go back in the other room where you can continue with your attempt to motivate me to pack everything for five-week trip in that backpack. I have to go to NYADA at 8:00 in the morning because that was the only time I could get in when I cancelled at the last minute today, so we have to go to sleep at a reasonable time.”

“I remember.” He kissed Kurt’s knuckles and let go of his hand. He turned over and got out of the bed.
“Well, the one that came in second didn’t have this feature.” He undid the flap at the base of the back and flipped it under the backpack and fastened it into place.

“Why is this an important feature?”

“You’re not thinking about where the wheels will be – dirt, possibly wet, maybe sticky. This way when you’re switching from pulling it to wearing it that flap covers the wheels and keeps them from touching the back of your clothes.”

“I’m convinced. 100%. Excellent feature to be invented.” He pecked Sebastian on the lips.

“They’re made out of ripstop waterproof fabric with covers over the zippers to keep our stuff dry if it starts to rain.”

“Also, an excellent feature.”

“They have a secret panel that you can only get to if the backpack is off where you can store your passport, extra money, your debit card when you’re not going to be using it, and even your phone if your in an area where people get pick-pocketed a lot.”

“Good invention.”

“The main compartment has a double zipper with a metal ring to put a lock through so that it doesn’t unzip accidentally or with help from a pick-pocketer. It has straps on the inside to keep your clothes laying flat when in transit.”

“You did good, Bas. They’re perfect.” He wrapped his arm around Sebastian’s waist. “Now, only if I had that spell Hermione uses to make things bigger on the inside than they are on the outside.”

“Every person who rents an apartment in New York City wishes they knew that spell.”

Kurt laughed. “Let’s go eat.” He squeezed Sebastian a little and then let go of him and headed to the kitchen. “I have to contemplate a way to create a somehow varied and interesting wardrobe that will be good for five weeks on my dream vacation with my hot boyfriend that will all fit in that backpack.”

“Keep in mind that even if you can fold better than Marie Kondo, everything you put in will make the bag heavier and some days you’ll we wearing it for several hours at a time.”

“Right. Excellent folding skills do not change the laws of physics.”

What Kurt had said registered. He turned and faced Kurt. “You think I’m hot?” He started humming “I’m Too Sexy for my Shirt” and dancing around in the kitchen still facing Kurt. He winked at Kurt before he turned around to reached up and grab two bowls and turned to get the ladle. He ladled the stew he had made into the bowls to let it cool for a few minutes. He turned back towards Kurt and stepped close enough to reach him. He ran his hands down Kurt’s arms, and started to sing modified lyrics. “You’re too sexy for your shirt, too sexy for your shirt…”
Kurt shook his head and laughed. He strutted like he was on the catwalk to pick up the bowls of stew and carried them to the table. He went back and grabbed spoons.

Sebastian put two glasses of water on the table. Kurt sat down. Sebastian grabbed napkins and sat down next to him.

Kurt’s tone turned serious. “I know you have questions. I don’t want him to be an ongoing part of our relationship. I guess I would rather get them out of the way if you have things you want to know.”

“I don’t want him to be a topic of discussion either. And I definitely don’t want details.”

“So, do you want to ask me things or not?” Kurt stirred his stew and stared in the general direction of his bowl.

“I guess I don’t know what to ask because I don’t want to be nosy, but some things you say don’t make much sense.” Sebastian copied Kurt’s position and didn’t look at him when he responded, trying to give him a less pressured feeling than staring at him.

“Okay. You know what happened at Scandals. And you know that the next night I gave in to having sex with him. Well, I wasn’t honestly ready to take that step with him. We had never done more than kiss, no making out or anything. I was still upset about the night before, but I was trying to be … anyway… I wasn’t ready and I was not willing to give up any control, so I took control of everything.”

“So, without you sharing any more details, I can surmise that his propensity for loving the spotlight made this arrangement okay with him.”

“Pretty much. And after he moved here, the glaring lack of privacy always made everything more time-sensitive and I managed to keep him too focused on what I was doing for him to focus on what he wasn’t doing, not that he ever really gave me any indication that he wanted to do something he wasn’t doing.”

“I’ll tell you that while Pascalle and I were exclusive and we loved each other, we also had he same issue with a lack of privacy. My maman and I lived with my grandparents as you already know. And my grandmère was already retired when we moved back to France. So, she was home a lot of the time. Pascalle’s father worked from home whenever he could and there was no ability to predict when that would be. He and I never had penetrative sex. And if I were to try to describe to you the type of relationship that he and I had, I would say it was similar to how you described what you thought a relationship would be like between you and Adam. Love, but no fiery passion. I was happy with him. I was loved. I was cared for. We were physical with each other and we both enjoyed it. But this between us, touching you and feel my skin buzz or tingle or burn, I’ve never felt that before.”

“Me neither. I guess I might as well say it now. I’ve never done oral, either way. We really did skip over everything in between. At school, 95% of the time an observer would not have known we were a couple. Even after he moved here, he wasn’t a fan of PDA. Mercedes made a comment last fall that stuck with me. She said that if she had been spying on Blaine or following him around the City that she would have thought that Sam was his boyfriend, not me. And I found out from Sam that Blaine confessed to having a crush on him about three weeks before he started working on the engagement extravaganza. It was pretty much everyone’s first time seeing us kiss on the stairway at Dalton that day. He didn’t even sit with me in Glee all that often.”

“Wait, he had a crush on Sam when he was planning that monstrosity of a proposal?”
“Yes. As far as I can tell, he’s never found me physically attractive.”

Sebastian couldn’t stand to continue to keep his gaze off of Kurt. He reached out for Kurt’s left hand and took it. He adamantly declared, “He’s stupid and that’s not a word I use often. But he’s not going to be the topic anymore tonight.” He scooted his chair back from the table. “Come here, please.” He spread his knees making some room in the chair seat for Kurt to sit.

“You want me to sit on your lap?”

“More or less, yes.”

Kurt got up and sat in the available space. “Like this?”

He wrapped his arms around Kurt’s waist and held on to him. “Now, put your feet up on the rungs under the chair. You’ll be more comfortable.” He waited for Kurt to adjust a bit. “Put your hands wherever you want to.” He smiled as Kurt slid his hands through his hair and around the back, and stopping with them at the base of his hairline. “Mmm.” Sebastian closed his eyes. “I really like it when you play with my hair.”

“I like playing with your hair.” He massaged Sebastian’s head and played with his hair. He leaned forward and kissed Sebastian. “Why did you want me to sit in your lap?”

“Because you were too far away. I wanted you where I could look you in the eyes.” He pecked him on the lips. “I think you’re gorgeous. Utterly beautiful on the inside and outside. I really want to change my Facebook status and post ridiculously cute selfies of the two of us – as completely ludicrous as that might seem.”

“Really?”

“Absolutely. I loved getting tagged in your birthday photo as one of your best friends. It will be even better to show you off as my boyfriend.”

“I’m not a circus dog.”

He rolled his eyes. “Definitely not. You’re my sexy boyfriend. And I won’t stop telling you how attractive you are unless you really don’t want me to say anything about how I feel.”

“Don’t stop. I don’t know how long it will take before it sinks in. I’m hardheaded.”

“Mmm. But in that hard head there’s a beautiful mind that is amazing. I’ll just keep at it. Water chisled the Grand Canyon. My affectionate words will make their way in somehow.” Sebastian kissed him quickly again.

Kurt pressed in when Sebastian started to break the kiss. He steadied himself by holding on to Sebastian’s shoulder with one hand while putting the other behind his neck. He continued to play with Sebastian’s hair while he licked his way into a passionate kiss that took their breath away. “We can take a selfie on the couch when we relax and read for a while, but first I have to go deal with the beeping washer.” He kissed him again before he stood up. A few minutes later, he was back and he finished eating.

“Do you want anymore?” Sebastian asked, as he was packing up the leftovers and getting ready to wash the Crockpot.

“No, thank you, but it was good.” He finished and put his dishes in the dishwasher. He put his hands on Sebastian’s shoulder and slid them down to his elbows. He began placing gentle kisses on
Sebastian’s left shoulder and worked his way across his back to his right shoulder. He took a deep
breath and wrapped his arms around Sebastian and turned his face, pressing his cheek to
Sebastian’s back and lightly grazing his thumbs across Sebastian’s abdomen. He was at peace and
it was an unusual feeling to him. So unusual that it felt wrong at first, but then he relaxed and
soaked it in.

Sebastian dried his hands and turned in Kurt’s arms. He repositioned Kurt’s arm and began to
dance and hum, “I Wanna Be Loved by You.” He moved them until they were in the open area. He
let go of Kurt’s waist, but continued to hold his hand, and began to tap dance barefoot. He stopped
and indicated for Kurt to imitate him. Kurt fumbled but smiled and then stopped, giving Sebastian
a turn again. They kept up the back and forth through the short song. At the end, Sebastian tugged
Kurt toward him, but he remained steadfast, which made Sebastian laugh and he twirled himself
into Kurt’s arms instead.

“You are a lot of fun,” Kurt said.

“You bring it out in me.” He kissed Kurt before he untwirled himself. “How about if we just leave
the packing until tomorrow and we really focus on it when you get home? All of the clothes you
just did should be dry enough to actually pack then if you decide that any of them are going.”

“What is your alternate plan for the evening then?”

“Well, it’s 8:00.”

Kurt noticed the box on the floor next to the shoe cabinet. “Did that come today?”

“Oh, yeah. I brought it up when I got home. I forgot to tell you. I’m sorry. Were you expecting
something?”

“Yes, your birthday present. It was supposed to be here last week.”

“It’s for me?”

Kurt picked it up. “Open it.” He handed it to Sebastian.

Sebastian sat down on the ottoman, peeled the tape off, and opened it. “No way!” He took all five
books out of the box and looked at each one before putting them in the box and sitting it on the
floor. He got up and wrapped Kurt into a bear hug and spun him around. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. You had up through 7, so I looked to see if the series continued past that point.
Number 13 comes out the end of September.”

“Okay, so revised plan. We still read, but I’m going to read L’empératrice maléfique. And you can read… which one are you reading?”

“Dans le piège de Magister – number 6.”

“So, put a shirt on and I will too. Then, a selfie of us with my new books. I’m going to post it, but
I’ll let you see first.”

Kurt put a shirt on and fixed his hair. Sebastian was waiting for him on the sofa. He plopped down
next to him and put his feet up on the ottoman.

Sebastian propped the books up against them and extended his arm to get their faces and the books
in the photo. “Three, two, one.” He pressed the button. He cropped the picture and showed it to
Kurt. “What do you think?”

“Not terrible. Try one more time.”

“Three, two, one.” Sebastian showed it to Kurt.

“Better. What do you think?”

“I agree.” He cropped it. “Can I change my status and post this?”

“Sure.” Kurt took books 9-12 and put them on the bookcase. “I’m not embarrassed that we’re together. I just don’t get on social media anymore. After not using it much, and then not at all for all that time, I just got out of the habit of looking at any of it. But if you put that you’re in a relationship with me, I will sign onto Facebook and confirm it before you post the picture.”

Sebastian clicked it. “Done.”

Kurt pulled his phone out and logged into Facebook through Safari and confirmed the request. “Now everyone will know.” He sat back down next to Sebastian. “How about we go shower and come back out and relax and read?”

Sebastian turned and kissed him above the ear. “Sounds great. My shower or yours?” He waggled his eyebrows and grinned.

“Bas!”

He leaned back in and started to sing.

You are my fire,
My one desire.
Believe when I say.
I want it that way.

Kurt smiled and shoulder checked him. “Hmm.” Kurt started to sing.

I’m crazy for you.
Touch me once and you’ll now it’s true.
I never wanted anyone like this.
It’s all brand new.
You’ll feel in my kiss.
I’m crazy for you.

“I’m not getting a good feel for whether that answer meant mine or yours.”

“Bas!”

“Yes, cupcake?”

“I told you no cupcake.” He gave Sebastian the evil eye, followed by a wink.

Sebastian laughed and turned and kissed his cheek. “Je t’aime, mon feu.”

“Enough horsing around or we’ll run out of time to read and make out.”

Sebastian popped right up. “Shower it is.” He skipped down to their bedroom to shower.
Kurt shook his head and got up. “What have I gotten myself into?” He was still smiling when he came back out to the living room to find that Sebastian had moved the ottoman to the other side of the sofa.

“The light’s better for reading over here. I brought your glasses and your book.”

“Thanks.” Kurt took them and put his glasses on. He put his leg over the top of Sebastian’s and got comfortable and opened his book.

Less than an hour later, Sebastian closed his book and took his glasses off. “Ready to go to bed?”

Kurt checked the time. “It’s 9:15. I’ve never seen you go to bed before 10:00.”

“That’s because I never had a gorgeous boyfriend who said he wanted to make out with me after we read for a while.” He got up and held his hand out.

“Oh, I see.” He handed Sebastian his book and his glasses.

Sebastian smirked and put them on the shelf next to the sofa and reached out for Kurt again. He pulled Kurt to standing, and then turned the light off. One of the lights in their bedroom was on and gave out enough light that they could see.

Kurt picked out clothes for the next day, making sure to choose something he would not take with him on their trip. He waited for Sebastian to come out of the bathroom, and then he went in. When he came out, the room was dark. He let his eyes adjust and he walked around the bed and got in. He lay down and Sebastian scooted closer. He moved his arm so that Sebastian could lay his head on his chest.

“We don’t have to make out, you know. We can just lie here and snuggle and talk.”

“You lured me away from my awesome book and now you don’t want to kiss me?” Kurt whined teasingly.

“Of course, I want to kiss you. I just want to make sure you know that I’m not going to jump you, just because of what you said earlier. We were playing around. I love kissing you and the making out was amazing. But I also love lying here and talking to you like we’ve done for ages, well we used to lie on opposite ends of the sectional, but you know what I mean. That’s how we got to know each other so well and how I fell in love with you.”

“How long have you…?”

“Known that I was in love with you?”

“Probably not long after spring break, but I wouldn’t admit to myself because in all honesty I thought you might be falling for Adam. I tried to tell myself that I shouldn’t get my hopes up. And then when Elliott came back into the picture, I felt like my chances were dwindling quickly. I didn’t know much about Elliott, but you two had all these inside jokes and laughed a lot about things that didn’t make sense to me. After Adam went back to England and you talked to Blaine and declared him irrelevant, and you never seemed to consider Elliott as anything other than a friend and co-worker, I thought maybe I might, maybe have a chance. Sam left and neither of us had the pressure of school. We spent so much more time together and we got along so well, and being with you was easy. I knew I was head over heels, but I couldn’t do anything about it yet. I thought I would be getting my trust fund and I wanted to do what was expected of me to get it. I
wanted to be able to use the trust fund for us to stay here in the apartment together. I thought a lot of things that turned out to be inaccurate, but in the end we do get to stay in the apartment. Just so you know, I had already been discussing your need for an extended vacation with Isabelle. She knew that I was planning to take you to France with me after I got my trust fund. Well, I had hoped you would go with me.”

“Really?”

“Yes. The trip wasn’t something I just came up with the day after my birthday. I was moping and Grandma wanted to know what was bothering me and I told her about how Father’s disowning me had ruined my plan to go back to France for the last month of the summer and to take you with me. I had already planned to tell you how I felt the evening of my birthday.”

Kurt moved his hand from Sebastian’s shoulder to the side of his face, and then gently guided his face upwards so they could kiss. “How would you feel about sleeping with out shirts off? I think your pajama-less packing idea might have some merit.”

“Oh, really?” He slid up into a sitting position and took his t-shirt off and put it over the headboard. “Do you need any help?” Sebastian put his hands on the hem of Kurt’s t-shirt, and then slipped his thumbs underneath and lightly ran them across Kurt’s stomach.

“I don’t need help, but you’re more than welcome to remove it.” He sat up and let Sebastian pull his shirt off.

When Sebastian turned back from putting Kurt’s t-shirt over the top of his, Kurt tackled him down on to the bed and kissed him, and then lay down beside him. Sebastian startled, and then laughed.

“Is that it? You jump me and I get a single kiss?”

“If you want more kisses, you know where to find them.”

“I’m not sure that I do.” He rolled Kurt onto his back and straddled him and started to kiss him random places, lightly licking him as he went. Kurt started squirming, but just a little. He was trying to keep a straight face, but when Sebastian moved to his ribs, he couldn’t contain the laughter.

“Well, I seem to have found where the laughter button is, but not the kisses yet. I’ll have to keep licking, I mean looking.” He resumed his quest, making Kurt laughed even more. Before Kurt got to the point of aggravation, Sebastian started kissing up his neck and then down his jaw and kissed him on the lips. “Aha!”

Kurt wrapped his hand behind Sebastian’s neck and slid his fingers into his hair. He ran his other hand down his back to keep him close. He rolled them onto their sides and kept kissing him.

“Good morning, Kurt.”

“Thanks for letting me reschedule. Sorry about the late cancellation yesterday. It seemed like I was going to be able to make it, and then I got told it would be another hour.”

“It’s fine. I didn’t even know you could get a passport the same day.”

“For the right price, you can get a lot of things done more quickly, I suppose. I’ve never really had the money to put that hypothesis to the test before.”
“Yeah, me neither. So, tell me what prompted the need for a same-day passport.”

Kurt told him what taken place since the morning of Sebastian’s birthday and ended with “So, now we’ve been together since Thursday night. Am I losing my mind or can you really fall in love with someone that quickly?”

“Oh, you can. You can also lust after someone in the blink of an eye, but from all of our previous conversations, I don’t think you fall into the group that does. But you had already developed a strong bond with Sebastian, just like you have with Sam and Adam.”

“You didn’t seem surprised by my revelation.”

“That’s because I’m not. You two have been dating without the sexual aspect of dating for close to a couple of months. And even before that, you preferred his company most of the time.”

“So, you don’t see this as something out of the blue?”

“Nope. You’ve been working on yourself. You’ve worked through how far you had let yourself slip in your priorities and you learned to put yourself back up at the top of the list. You got your closure, which was good for you. You can talk about how things were and be objective enough about your own behavior to modify it.”

“So you think I’m ready for this?”

“I’m not sure anyone is ever 100% ready for anything. Do I think there’s something glaringly obvious that you haven’t worked through that should stop you from trying? No. Do I think you still have an Achilles’ heel? Yes.”

“What?”

“I think the first time or few times he does something insensitive will be a real test for you. You’re going to have to try to step back mentally and consider whether what he did was actually a breech of your trust in him or just something that hurts, but wasn’t done with any intent to hurt you or was completely unintentional.”

“For example?”

“Hmm.” Mr. Salazar thought for a moment. “Let’s say he’s waiting for you here at NYADA. Someone who’s seen him around enough says, ‘Hey, you don’t look busy. Will you run these lines with me? I’m X, you’re Y.’ He takes the pages and runs through it. And he gets into as I’m imagining he would from your descriptions of him. Unbeknownst to him, this scene involves kissing. When it comes to that part, the other person kisses him. They go on and finish the scene out. Afterwards, he tells the guy, ‘Look, I don’t mind running scenes, but don’t actually kiss me even if the script says to, or I won’t read with you again.’ The guy agrees and apologizes, not having even considered it since actors kiss people they aren’t dating fairly frequently. But by the time you get out of class, three people have texted you the photo of Sebastian kissing the NYADA student. You go to find him and you’re upset. Now, you’re faced with how to deal with what seems to be a blatant act of cheating. How you deal with that will be a test for you. Can you let it go without it tearing your relationship apart? Or by the time you get to him will you have decided that it’s over before you even know what happened?”

“You’re right. You’re definitely right. I still struggle to believe that he finds me attractive. And if I got texts from people of him kissing an attractive guy, my heart would fall through the floor instantaneously. That’s definitely something I need to work on still. I decided to extend my trust to
people and allowed myself to be hurt repeatedly by pushing myself to the bottom of what was important. I’d randomly stand up for myself here and there, but of course that caused more drama, not less. I wanted people in my life and I consistently put them and their happiness above my own.”

“And there’s nothing wrong with putting the person you love’s happiness above your own some of the time. And having that person do the same sometimes. That’s part of the balance when you trust and love. When he offers to go to your favorite restaurant instead of choosing his own favorite restaurant, that’s him putting your happiness above his own, but at the same time he gets the benefit of being happy because he’s made you happy. Whereas going to that same place alone would not be the same because you wouldn’t be there to make it fun for him. And I know that you know this because you’re willing to do those types of things, but you’ve not spent time around many other people who are. You’re going to have to learn to let him do that for you. You have to be willing to let him sacrifice for you, even if you start by letting that sacrifice be eating Chinese instead of Indian.”

“That balance issue we’ve talked about so many times.”

“Yes. You have to learn to receive. You’re used to being the only giver. If you want this to work with Sebastian, you have to learn to let him give to you too.”

Kurt nodded.

“You’re also used to being the only reliable person, and your paying job is to be someone’s personal assistant and keep their work life organized. But Sebastian is already reliable. He’s already lived on his own successfully. You mentioned before feeling like you were put in the position of being a mom in a sitcom, or something like that.”

“Yes.”

“This won’t be like that. Sebastian doesn’t need anyone in that role. Think about this, last year when he went to France for a month or whatever, did you say a single word about what he packed?”

Kurt shook his head. “I never even thought about it. He did everything himself.”

“He can still do everything himself. But now he wants to share his life with you. Don’t make the mistake of starting to micromanage him. You’ve already been living together successfully and happily for 8 months. There’s no need to change what’s working. Whatever you’re doing, keep doing it. Just now with kisses and hugs and whatever.”

“He doesn’t need me to take care of him.”

“But he likes it. There’s the difference. But you also have to let him take care of you or he’s going to be unhappy. It’s that balance thing. When you don’t feel like doing something, he’ll take that in stride. He won’t accuse you of anything. He’ll just accept your answer, the way you would his. I’m imagining that you’ve already seen this.”

“Yes.”

“One other thing I think is more of an issue with two guys who are equally capable of taking care of themselves is when he offers to do something, you’re going to have to watch your tendency to think that someone’s trying to show you up because that’s how your friends have been. I think you’re just going to have to be mindful of not letting that feeling voice itself, even if it is the first one to pop into your mind. If he says, ‘Here, let me get that.’ in reference to a box or a bag or
whatever, he’s not saying it to imply that you aren’t capable of doing it or that he can do it better than you. He’s more than likely just offering to be nice because he loves you.”

“The receiving thing.”

“Yes, the receiving thing.”

“And asking. You don’t have to drown under Herculean tasks if someone offers to share the load with you. And you can even ask them to as long as it doesn’t turn into a habit that turns into an expectation. And I think that’s how you ended up where you were with your friends.”

“Explain, please.”

“Jane, Rose, and Drake are friends and live together. Rose gets stuck because of subway issues. She finally makes it home and it was her evening to make dinner for everyone. Jane says it’s fine and helps her make dinner. The next time it’s Rose’s turn to make dinner, she doesn’t plan well and misses the subway, but arrives closer to on time. Jane helps her again so that everyone can get on with their planned evenings.”

Kurt interrupted, “And over time Rose just does other things and plans less carefully knowing that Jane will be there to help her with it. And one night, Rose shows up late enough that Jane has already finished making everything and Rose just sits down and eats with everyone. Eventually Rose quits even considering that it was her job to cook that night because Jane starts doing it all the time because the other two want to eat and Drake is at work until it’s time to eat that particular day of the week. So, it goes from Jane helping out in a unique situation to Jane doing it all the time. And you’re right. Been there, done that. I wouldn’t do that to anyone, but I hadn’t really considered how so many of the things around the loft ended up the way they did, but that’s a really good explanation. I also got a lot of, ‘But you do it so much better.’”

“I’ve heard that one before. Manipulation.”

“Sebastian isn’t manipulative. He’s a tease though, but I already knew that. But he’s adding innuendo into the mix now.”

“Can I make an observation?”

“Isn’t that part of why I come here?” Kurt laughed.

“You’ve smiled more today than I’ve seen before. You’ve always been happier when you’ve talked about spending time with one of your three men, as you’ve called them before, but this is more than that.”

“I think that you’ve been telling me so many things about how friendship works and it’s sort of funny and ironic to sit here and tell you that as far as I can tell, I’ve found the real thing and that it’s amazing, but then I’m still sitting here fretting.”

“Ah, the irony of anxiety. We worry about how to get what we want. Once we get what we want, worry about how to keep it. Or we worry that we’re imagining things when we think we have what we want and we’re not convinced our own judgment can be trusted.”

“And what do you think? Should I trust that I have what I want this time and stop worrying about it so much?”

“Yes. That’s exactly what I think. Do I have a crystal ball that tells me that you two will get married and celebrate your 75th Anniversary together visiting the Louvre together in wheelchairs? I
don’t. Can I guarantee that you’ll be happily together five years from now? I can’t do that either. But do I think you have a good chance of being happy together? I do. He knows you, Kurt. You know him. You say you love him. You say that you’re in love with him. And you have the knowledge you need. Some of it you’ve never implemented, so it will be a bit rough in patches, but if you communicate and keep the balance relatively even in the relationship, I think you’ll be fine.”

“Happy feels weird.”

Mr. Salazar laughed. “I’m sure it does, but you deserve it. And joy and contentment, but those come from within and you’re getting there. I think contentment showed up right after your closure visit. And I think joy is close at hand. You have to sweep out more of the worry to make room for the joy. They don’t really cohabitate the same area.”

Kurt laughed. “Are you peddling brooms today? If so, I’d like the ‘sweeps anxiety away’ model, please.”

“If only. Nope, I’m afraid you’ll have to push the worry away yourself with a broom of your own making. Anxiety doesn’t really respond to other people’s brooms. A hundred people can reassure you, but it’s far less effective than reassuring yourself.”

Kurt nodded. “I know you have another appointment now. I won’t be back until the week school starts. I’ll make an appointment on my way out.”

“Have a good time.”

“I’m looking forward to it.” He got up and opened the door and stepped into the waiting area. “Bas!” His face lit up and he crossed the room quickly and practically hurled himself into Sebastian’s arms.

“Hey, gorgeous.” Sebastian enveloped him in his arms.

“I thought you were practicing.”

“I was.”

Mr. Salazar stepped out to let the next student know he was ready. Kurt caught his attention. He took Sebastian’s hand and crossed back to the office entrance.

“Mr. Salazar, this is my boyfriend, Sebastian Smythe.”

Mr. Salazar extended his hand. “It’s nice to meet you. I’ve heard lots of good things about you.”

Sebastian took it and shook it. “The same is true for you. It’s nice to meet you as well. You’ve been a big help to Kurt.”

“So have you.”

Kurt moved toward the secretary’s desk. He made an appointment for the first week of school, and then he and Sebastian left and stopped down a ways from the area. He turned so they were facing. Sebastian leaned in and kissed him.

“This is a nice surprise. I thought you were dancing for longer, and then going home.”

“I was, but Isabelle texted and she has food poisoning. We’re meeting her in 15 minutes. Let’s get moving. I didn’t tell her exactly where the shop is.” He teasingly pulled Kurt down the hallway,
but then abruptly stopped and veered into an empty classroom and closed the door behind them. He gently pushed Kurt into the door, away from where they could be seen, and he kissed Kurt determinedly.

Kurt responded by parting his lips and kissing him back just as passionately. When they paused for air, Kurt continued to kiss down Sebastian’s neck. “Won’t we be late?”

Sebastian struggled to put a sentence together with Kurt kissing his neck. “Not late. She’s two blocks from here.” He ran his hands down Kurt’s arms. “That feels amazing.”

He stopped kissing Sebastian’s neck and propped his head on his shoulder instead. “We’ll lose track of time and be late.” He gave him a peck on the lips.

“One more kiss and then we’ll go.” Sebastian leaned forward and Kurt met him halfway and they kissed again, full of passion like the first one. When they broke apart, Sebastian grinned and tried to brush his hands down Kurt’s shirt. “I told you.”

“What?”

“I wrinkled your shirt, but I’m not really all that sorry. I’d risk the wrinkles to kiss you again.”

Kurt rolled his eyes. “I’ll live with the wrinkles. I’m not giving up the kisses.”

Sebastian pecked him on the lips while wearing a mega-watt smile. He took Kurt’s hand. “Come on.”

Once they had finished their spur of the moment shopping trip, Kurt went with Isabelle back to Vogue and Sebastian headed home. Once he got there, he stopped at the security desk.

“How can I help you, Mr. Smythe?”

“I need to know if my father’s name is on the list of allowed visitors to this building and I need to know whether he has a key to the apartment.”

“You can follow me back to the office and I’ll check on that for you, sir.”

“Thank you.”

Sebastian sat and waited while the officer looked through the details on the apartment. He looked through his To Do list on his phone while he waited.

“He was issued a key to the apartment when he purchased it. His name is on the allowed list of visitors since he was the one who purchased the apartment.”

“Well, my great grandmother and I are now the sole owners of the apartment. I’ll go up and get the paperwork to show you. Once you have a copy of that, you can rescind his ability to visit, right?”

“Yes, sir. We can change his status to reflect your wishes if you can prove you own the apartment.”

“I’ll be right back down.” Sebastian stopped by the mailbox and grabbed what was in it. He laid the envelopes on the shoe cabinet as he went in. He grabbed the paperwork he needed and went back downstairs. He gave it to the security guard who scanned it into the file for the apartment.

He handed it back and spent some time using the computer. “I’m moving your father’s
information, like his ID and background check to the Not Allowed list for your apartment, which has two other people on it. You still want Adam, Elliott, Isabelle, Kurt, Sam, and of course Imogen was added since she is co-owner?"

“Yes for all of the people you named. Is there some way to flag my father’s name since he was previously allowed and no longer is? I don’t want any of the security guards who might have been familiar with him to let him in again by accident.”

“I will post his ID at the security desk with our list of people to be on the lookout for, if you want.”

“I just know that money talks, and he has enough to convince people to do what he wants. And I honestly don’t know if he’s been here when I wasn’t home. I only recently found out that his name was actually on the apartment. He said he bought it for me, so I mistakenly assumed that it was mine when, in fact, it was legally his. But that is no longer the case. I just want to make sure that he never steps foot in this building or my apartment.”

“We’ll see to that, sir.”

“You do that. Because anyone he can bribe, my great grandmother can have jailed.”

He nodded.

“Thank you. Is there a copy of the key kept by the security staff?”

“No, sir. If there’s an actual emergency, we’d have to access the apartment the hard way.”

“I appreciate your help with this.”

“You’re welcome, sir.”

Sebastian took his paperwork back upstairs and filed it. He left the building to go buy a new doorknob and deadbolt set for the apartment door.

\[
\text{[Image: Lock and key]
\]

When Kurt got home, he put his key in the doorknob to no avail. He knocked. Sebastian opened the door and let him in, kissing him before he was even all the way inside the apartment.

“What’s wrong with the doorknob?”

“I replaced it and the deadbolt while you were at work.” He shut and locked the door. “Your new key is there on the cabinet.”

Kurt took the old key off his keyring and replaced it with the new one, which he took to the kitchen and tossed in the trash.

“I already texted Sam and told him that he needed to be here by 6:30 Friday, so I can give him the new key before we go to the airport. I’m giving a key to Isabelle as well. She had my spare before. I changed it because I inquired today and my father has had access to the building and a key to this apartment ever since I moved in. I had his name removed and had him moved to the persona non grata list. Now, he can’t get in the building or into the apartment easily.”

“Good.”

“Oh. Speaking of Sam, two letters came for him today. They’re on the cabinet with his key.”
Kurt went to look at them. “This is more than likely the photo that Grandma Smythe wants a painting of, but this one is from his school. I’m going to call him to tell him about this one.” He took his phone out and called.

“Hey, Kurt! What’s up?”

“I just wanted to tell you that a letter came from your school today.”

“Oh. Open it. I can’t risk something being in there that I need to respond to and messing something up.”

“You’ll be here in three days.”

“Just open it. It’s fine.”

Kurt used the letter opener that he kept in the drawer of the cabinet and opened it. “Do you want me to read it to you? It’s a letter.”

“Yeah.”

_Samuel Evans,

This letter is to inform you that you have been awarded the Inspirational Artist scholarship. This is our school’s newest scholarship and was not among the scholarships available when you applied to the school. You were chosen as the first recipient of this scholarship.

The Inspirational Artist scholarship covers the full tuition cost, plus $1000 to cover school-related expenses, such as fees, art supplies and textbooks for coursework.

To accept or reject this scholarship offer, respond to this letter, either in writing or in person at the Office of the Bursar, as soon as possible so that your financial aid and billing can be adjusted for this school year. Response deadline is 08-07-15.

“I got a scholarship?”

“That’s what this paper says,” Kurt said.

“I got a scholarship.” Sam said incredulously.

“You got a scholarship,” Kurt said. “I’ll take a picture of it and text it to you so you can at least show them the photo of it when you go to the bursar’s office to accept it.”

Sebastian pulled his phone out and took the picture and texted it.

“Sebastian just texted it to you.”

“I can’t believe this. I won’t have to take out that loan. I also found out that I had signed up for the wrong dorm. I had selected one of the freshmen dorms because I thought I had to, but since I’m 21, I can move into this other building that’s co-ed. Lexi was going to live off-campus, but I can’t with my financial aid. So, she signed back up to live on campus. We’re going to be roommates.”

“That’s cool,” Kurt said. “I didn’t even know places had co-ed dorms with mixed gender roommates.”

“Me neither until a few days ago, but I’m looking forward to not living with people who just got out of high school.”
Kurt laughed. “I bet. It seems like a long time ago. We’ve all changed so much since then. Be sure to be here by 6:30 to get your new key. We have to get to the airport on time, but you need to be able to get in while we’re gone.”

“I already made arrangements. I’m leaving at 4:00.”

“See you Friday then.”

“See ya.”

“That’s really great for him,” Sebastian said. “I’m betting he quits the Copper Cup this weekend. He was only keeping the job because it paid better than the jobs he’d seen there, but he has his savings and if he doesn’t have to pay for anything for school and he gets to eat there, then he shouldn’t have to work during the school year.”

“That would be amazing for him, especially the first year of getting back into the swing of doing schoolwork. He’s been away from it for two years, other than these summer classes, which aren’t the traditional type of classes.”

“Dinner is ready. Let’s eat. I have plans.” He winked.

Kurt felt the weight of an unidentifiable object in his hands, but he waited.

“Okay. Open your eyes.”

He looked at what he was holding. “It’s one of those really nice label makers. What are we labeling?”

“Well, I bought a couple of packages of the bottles that are allowed in carry-ons, so we’re going to fill them with your awesome body care products because when I was going to do it for you as a surprise, I realized that was not up for the task.”

Kurt kissed him. “I appreciate that you tried, though. We can do it together.”

“Once you let me know which of these things are absolute musts, I’ll order them to be delivered to my aunt’s house and we can get them once we’re there. But we can’t take full bottles on the plane. So, this the best idea I could come up with or we can check all of your skincare products in their own suitcase and check it as actual luggage.”

“That would be funny, but this is fine. Let’s get started.”

An hour later, everything was in bottles and labeled and ready to go in the suitcase, which Kurt still needed to pack.

Sebastian wrapped his arms around Kurt. “Will it be easier for you to pack if I help, observe, or leave you alone?”

“Did you already pack?”

“I did.”

“Can I see what you packed or will you at least tell me? I’m not really sure what to pick.”

“Comfort first, then fashion. Super tight pants won’t be all that comfortable to hike around in,
although the view from behind would be lovely for me.” Sebastian kissed up the side of Kurt’s neck. “I washed and dried the new socks I got us. Yours are next to your suitcase. I already packed laundry detergent and dish soap in two of the bottles earlier.” He walked Kurt around to the other side of the bed and kissed him. He unzipped his suitcase to show Kurt what he had packed.

Kurt looked through it carefully without messing any of it up. He remembered what Mr. Salazar had said earlier. Sebastian was fully his equal. It felt amazing that he didn’t need to micromanage any part of what they were doing and the fact that Sebastian took the lead on getting the things they needed made him feel secure and relaxed. He zipped it back up, and turned to face him. “Thanks.” He wrapped his arms around Sebastian’s neck and held him close. “I’m really excited. I’m glad you want me to come with you. And to answer your question, you can help me, if you want.”

“Really? You’d let me fold your clothes.”

“Well. Let’s go in our room, so I can pick.”

“Thank you,” Kurt said as he snuggled into Sebastian’s side.

“For what?”

“Everything.”

Sebastian tipped Kurt’s chin up and kissed him. “You’re welcome.” He reached over with his right hand and ran his fingers through Kurt’s hair. “You seem a lot more at ease tonight.”

“I had several epiphanies today. It’s been quite an enlightening day.” He ran his thumb across Sebastian’s lips. He scooted up in the bed a little and ran his hand through Sebastian’s hair, leaving his hand behind his head stroking the back of his hair and lightly massaging the back of his neck.

“That feels really good.”

Kurt kissed him. “I want you to feel good. I want to make you feel good.” Kurt pressed closer and kissed him again and again and again.

“You do. When you smile at me. When you dance with me. When you snuggle up close and read with me. When we talk. When we cook and eat together. When you let me hold you. And as silly as it may sound you letting me fold your clothes earlier made me swoon.”


“You do? Like you did back in May when you told me before?”

“I still love you as a friend and a confidant, but more than just that – as my lover and my partner.”

Sebastian pressed gentle kisses down Kurt’s jaw line. “Really? Don’t say unless mean it.”

“I do mean it. That was one of my realizations today. It seemed like this big leap, but today I realized that it’s been a work in progress, probably since you came back from France in December. Every day we got closer, and when we kissed the sparks we’ve always had just ignited. I love you and I’m in love with you. And like you said, I want us to burn bright and bold together.”
Chapter 30

Kurt and Sebastian made it to the exterior of the Charles de Gaulle airport a little after 1:30 on Saturday, which felt like 7:30 in the morning, but despite his lack of sleep, Kurt was too excited to be tired at that point. He looked around as they stood in line to use a photo kiosk. Kurt attempted to make his hair look decent and made a neutral, but pleasant face for his photos. Sebastian went next.

Sebastian grabbed them. “You even look gorgeous in these tiny photos that no one looks good in.”

Kurt looked at Sebastian’s. “You look good too. Now, what do we do?”

“Get in that line.” He pointed, took Kurt’s hand, and weaved in and out of the crowd carefully, and got in line.

“Lots of lines.”

Sebastian squeezed his hand. “This is the next to last one for a little while.”

“As long as I’m with you, I’m good. Better than good, actually. I’m so excited.”

“And you’re adorable when you’re excited.”

“I’m glad you think so because I’m sure you’re going to see adorable a lot during this trip.”

They stopped to have a late lunch, which was breakfast for them, at a place not far from Sebastian’s grandmère’s place. After they ate, Sebastian showed him around the area a bit. He took him to the street that he had Sam paint and they walked along and looked in a few shops. They walked the rest of the way to her home.

“Come in, dear. Come in. I’ve missed you.” She hugged Sebastian. “Welcome, Kurt.” She offered Kurt a hug as well. She closed the door and followed them into the living area.

Sebastian took his backpack off and sat it against the wall. Kurt followed his lead. Sebastian showed Kurt to the bathroom and let him go first. Once Sebastian came out, they went back into the living area together. Kurt went to the window and looked out. He turned back around and smiled at Sebastian.

“How did you do to get such a beautiful boy to look at you like you hung the moon?” she asked quietly, but in an obviously playful way.

Kurt started to sing. “There’s something sweet and almost kind…” Kurt laughed and reached out for Sebastian. “I’m only teasing. I think Sebastian failed to mention that I speak French.”

“He told me. I was just teasing him. I see you like to tease him as well. It’s good for him. I’m glad you’ve come. It’s wonderful to meet you. I’ve heard a lot of good things about you. And even with the tiny snippet you sang, I know he was right about your singing voice. It’s lovely.”

“Thank you.”

“Please sit and tell me all about yourself, Kurt. And you can tell me what you’ve been up to Sebastian. You were fairly vague how you managed to finagle a 5-week trip home.”
After spending an hour or so catching up with Grandmère, Kurt and Sebastian showered and changed so they were ready to be picked up to go to his aunt and uncle’s for dinner and to spend the night.

Kurt was introduced to so many people he lost track about five minutes into the introductions. People were coming in and out of the house and he couldn’t place the kids with the parents they belonged to at all. He decided he’d ask Sebastian for a family tree later to do a better job of remember who was who.

They had an enjoyable dinner. Kurt spent a lot of time answering similar questions. He and Sebastian had decided on a true version of events that didn’t mention Sebastian’s unkind behavior in high school.

Around 9:00, everyone headed out. Kurt had expected it to be difficult to fall asleep the first night since his body would think that it was 4:30 in the afternoon when it was his normal bedtime according to the clock. But his restless sleep on the plane the night before made him tired enough to go to bed at 10:00. They showered again and put the one pair of pajama pants that they had each brought and got in bed.

Kurt curled up and laid his head on Sebastian’s chest. He ran his hand through Sebastian’s hair. He guided Sebastian to turn his face a little and he scooted up enough to kiss Sebastian. “Everyone in your family was so nice to me.”

“Why wouldn’t they be?”

“No reason, really. I just don’t think I’ve ever actually been in a group of that many people who were nice, especially people who were nice to me in particular. I don’t want you to think that I expected them to be mean. Family isn’t something I’m used to being around.”

“I think you’re just not used to kindness in general, but that’s going to change.”

“I’m used to you being kind. And a few other people, but you’re right. Even my professors and instructors don’t fall into the category of nice or kind. You’re Miss July’s TA. You know how she talks to the students. She’s far from the only instructor with a God complex and vitriol-laced so-called constructive criticism.”

“If I had auditioned for NYADA and gotten in, I think I would stayed the first year, but during the first semester, I would have applied to transfer somewhere else for the next school year. Maybe I’m wrong, but it seems like there have to be more enjoyable programs.”

“They have a high success rate with students getting parts in shows on Broadway.”

“But is it because they train people to be their best or because they’ve treated their extremely talented students like dirt for four years and they’re ripe for the picking by unscrupulous directors who are taskmasters, but know that the NYADA students won’t put up a fuss because they’re used to being treated terribly?”

“I’ve wondered the same. I came into the school already used to being treated that way. But no one stands up for themselves because they know if they get on the bad side of one of the NYADA professors or instructors, the gossip chain on the NYADA chatboards will spread it around. And the chatboards aren’t secure. I went on them all the time the semester before I got in. I knew Rachel...
had quit NYADA within a half hour of it happening – hours before I met her and she told me herself. But that’s the way the business is. If someone gives a director any trouble, the information makes the rounds, and the person can become unhirable in an afternoon.”

“That’s really sad.”

“It is. But no more talking about that. This is the first real vacation I have ever been on and I am in the very city I have dreamed of visiting. And to top all of that off, I’m here with you. I do have one question though. I’m confused as to why your aunt is letting us sleep together. She could have had you stay in your cousin’s room with him and had me sleep in here alone.”

“You’re right. She could have, but they already knew about you from the photos I had sent and from talking to them about our sightseeing adventures and different things the two of us did together. You know I’ve been keeping in contact with everyone since I was here in December. I told her I was bringing you and that you were my boyfriend now. Dating here isn’t the same as in the US. In the US, people go on dates in coupled pairs to get to know each other. They sort of interview each other and try to find out if they’re compatible. People date more than one person at a time, and they have a physical relationship with all of the people that they’re seeing. There are all these different levels. Seeing each other, casually dating, friends with benefits, hooking up with someone, having a boyfriend but not being exclusive – an open relationship, fuckbuddies, and honestly even after four years in the US, I’m not sure that I understand the differences in several of those things. There are people here hook up. And people go out in pairs, but going out to dinner with someone doesn’t imply a romantic interest. People don’t put all this pressure on wearing exactly the right thing and behaving a certain way to impress the other person. The US version of dating seems very weird to me. Both people are trying to figure out their compatibility with the other person, all while the women attempt to cover over every physical trait she has that is not lauded by society and the men dress up wearing clothes they would otherwise never wear. So, they put on a façade to prevent the other person from knowing the real them, all while trying to say and do the right things during each date. I don’t see how you can determine compatibility with any level of accuracy while both parties are trying to present their vision of their best self. I’m probably not making any sense because this is a cultural thing that is just different. Dating isn’t like that here. There’s not really even word in French that has the connotations that the word dating does in English. Being someone’s boyfriend here means being in a committed exclusive relationship with the person. Anyway, when I told my family that you were my boyfriend now and that I was bringing you home, they took it as a meet-the-family trip and a vacation for the two of us. Telling them that you were my boyfriend meant that we are in a committed long-term relationship. We live together. Same sex marriage has only been legal for here for a little over two years. Up until then, living together as a couple was the pinnacle of a gay relationship. That and perhaps a commitment ceremony where the couple exchanged wedding rings that were purely symbolic since there was no legal way to get married.”

“So you’re family thinks we’re going to get married?”

“I didn’t talk to each one of them individually about this particular topic, but I was being greeted and congratulated on finding such a wonderful, sweet guy and how amazing it was that I found someone fluent in French. I’m not sure that it matters to them one way or the other about whether we have a traditional wedding. The two of us living together as a couple solidifies our long-term level of commitment to them.”

“I see.”

“Does that bother you? Do you want me to tell them something different?”
Kurt rearranged a bit and got Sebastian to roll towards him so they were facing each other. He started his answer with a passionate kiss that Sebastian joined right in, kissing back just as passionately. When they broke for air, Kurt ran his thumb along Sebastian’s jaw. “Surprisingly, no. I think I date like a Frenchman. I’m an all-in kind of guy. I don’t do casual dating. You already knew that about me. I do want to get married some day. I want to be with someone willing to make that level of commitment to me, in a real way, not only in words but actions too. And as of a little over a month ago, I could get married anywhere in the country. It’s finally a reality. I’ve been planning weddings since I was a toddler. I know I already told you that too. That was one of the things that I was certain you would tease me about, but didn’t.”

“Wanting to find someone who loves you for who you are and who will stay with you is not something to laugh at someone for. It’s really sweet and romantic. I think you are probably the most romantic guy I’ve ever met. And I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that now that you’ve chosen me that I won’t lack for love or affection or attention.” He kissed Kurt. “Neither will you.”

“Back to what you asked. I’m not freaked out because being married is what I’ve wanted for a long, long time. And if that’s where we’re heading, I’m actually really good with that because I love you and I trust you.”

“And I love you and I will do everything in my power to never lose that trust because it means everything to me.”

“Thank you.” Kurt brushed his lips against Sebastian.

Sebastian smiled and kissed Kurt back just as gently. It had become a little silly playful thing between the two of them kiss each other back and forth with barely there kisses until one of them caved and kissed the other normally and from there, the kissing heated up. Before long, Kurt was smiling and starting to giggle. He caved and kissed Sebastian, but he changed up the game and after the regular kiss, he moved slightly and kissed along the underneath of Sebastian’s jaw line towards his ear and then down his neck.

Sebastian moaned. “That… drives me wild.”

“Too much?” he asked quietly.

“Maybe a little, if I’m going to stay quiet. But we’re definitely revisiting that the first night we stay in a hotel.”

“Mmm. M’kay. Snuggles or less provocative kisses?”

“Kisses, then snuggles.”

A few minutes later, Kurt was the big spoon holding Sebastian and kissing along his shoulders. “So, is your family starts to ask me questions about a wedding? If so, what is the culturally appropriate answer? I don’t want to offend anyone with my answer.”

“I don’t think anyone will ask questions unless we tell them we’re engaged.”

“Okay.” He ran his hand along Sebastian’s upper and lower arm gently. “What the plan for tomorrow?”

“Well, we’ll get dressed, wash what we’ve already worn, and let it dry while we’re gone. That way when we leave Monday morning, we’ll have as many clean clothes as possible. And we’re going out sightseeing after we eat breakfast.”
“Okay.” Kurt was surprised at his ability to let go with Sebastian.

“You’re not going to ask anything?”

“I told you that I trust you. I’m sure it will be amazing.” He slipped his arm under Sebastian’s.

Sebastian put his hand over the top of Kurt’s and slipped his fingers through Kurt’s. He ran his thumb along Kurt’s lightly caressing it. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“Oh, my God, Sebastian. It’s amazing. It’s all amazing! I think I might love it here even more than I love New York City.”

Kurt took off speed walking toward the Eiffel Tower as soon as they got off bus. Kurt hadn’t let go of Sebastian’s hand and he had to move quickly to keep up. He had a smile as big as Kurt’s on his face from watching Kurt get so enthusiastic. When they finally got close enough to touch it, Kurt reached out and gently placed his hand on the structure. Sebastian managed to capture the moment in a photo without Kurt noticing.

“It’s huge. It’s wonderful. Can we go up?”

“Of course. Let’s go get tickets.”

Once they had their tickets, Kurt wanted to walk up the stairs to the first level. They walked around and looked at everything. Kurt found the glass floor unnerving, but really cool. After they finished looking around, they took the elevator up to the second level. They stood and looked to the southeast towards the Parc du Champs de Mars.

Sebastian slipped behind Kurt and propped his chin on Kurt’s shoulder and wrapped his arms around his waist. “The view is better than it was the last time I was here.” He kissed Kurt on the neck.

Kurt turned in his arms and surprised Sebastian by kissing him on the lips. “Let’s go see the view from the other sides.”

When they got around to the opposite side Kurt stood and watch some boats and stared off toward the Jardins du Trocadéro. “You can see everything. This is perfect. I’m so glad I got over my stubbornness and agreed to come with you.”

“Me too.”

“How long until our tickets to the top?”

“Another 20 minutes.”

“Let’s walk around again.” He turned and kissed Sebastian again and wrapped his arm around his waist and walked clockwise and took in the view from all four sides again.

When they finished, they went to wait for the elevator to the top. When they boarded Kurt stood closest to the glass and Sebastian stood behind him with his arms wrapped around Kurt. Kurt put his hands over the tops of Sebastian’s and leaned back into him just a bit. Sebastian propped his chin on Kurt’s shoulder and they looked out the elevator as the rode up, up, up to the top.
out and Kurt took Sebastian’s hand and went out to the walkway and stood and looked toward the southeast. He could see what they had seen before, but the perspective was different. With the added height, Kurt started pointing out landmarks he recognized.

“I think we can switch and you’ll be the tour guide,” Sebastian said, as he edged closer to Kurt.

“No way. My ability to remember what I’ve seen on a map of Paris and from history books doesn’t even rank against you having lived here for nearly a decade. Help me find someone to take our picture together, please.”

Sebastian looked around and found someone and asked her. Kurt set his camera up and handed it to her. She took a few shots.

She asked, “Boyfriends?”

Sebastian nodded.

“Scoot closer. Kiss each other.”

They did as she said.

“I love you, Bas.”

“I love you too.”

She took a few more shots. “Much better.” She smiled and handed Kurt’s camera back.

“Thanks,” Kurt said.

She nodded and smiled.

The two of them went back to looking around from all sides. They went down holding each other the way they came up. They got off and switched elevators. Once they were at the bottom again, Kurt led Sebastian over to one of the base legs and took a selfie of the two of them. He worked to get one showing the immensity of the tower.

“Is there anything else here you want to do?” Sebastian asked.

“Well, yes of course, but we can move on. Each place we go will always have something else to see.” Kurt let Sebastian lead him toward the center and they walked over the Seine and into the Jardins du Trocadéro.

They walked around for a bit, and once they had explored enough to satisfy Kurt’s curiosity just enough, Sebastian pointed out a double-decker bus. “That’s where we’re headed. We can spend as much time at each location as we want because we can get on and off the bus as many times as we want. The tour doesn’t stop until about 10 at night.”

“Thank you.”

“You want me to be honest with you, so here goes.” He pulled Kurt closer and spoke where only the two of them could hear. “I’m going to ask you not to thank me everywhere we go or everything we do together. I wanted to come here with you, to do these things with you. You’re not the only one getting what he wants and it makes me feel uncomfortable to you to keep implying that I’m in need of being repeatedly thanked for doing something that I wanted to do. So, every time you thank me for bringing you here, I’m going to thank you for coming.”
“But it would be weird to thank me for coming to do something I’ve always wanted to do.”

“It feels weird for you to thank me for asking you to come do something I’ve always wanted to do. So, how about this? We just enjoy ourselves. Yes, I’ve been to a lot of the places you’ll want to see in Paris, but that’s because I lived here. The rest of the places we’re going will be new to both of us.”

“You’re right that I want you to be honest. I’ll stop. It’s a steep learning curve to be around people who are genuinely pleased to have me around and for everyone to just automatically include me and act like me being here with you is totally normal and completely acceptable. And on top of that, they’re actually happy about it. I’m going to end up causing them to think I’m really weird if I keep thanking everyone for being kind like it’s extraordinarily unusual. They’re just treating me like family. It’s weird, but they’re not weird. They’re really sweet. And so are you.” Kurt kissed him. “Let’s go wait for a bus and go see whatever is on the bus tour.”

They spent the rest of the day visiting all of the top tourist attractions in Paris. Kurt’s love for the city grew as Sebastian told him about every place they visited, both personal information about his experiences and historical information. Kurt’s participation in PDA grew as well as he adjusted to the change in their relationship as well as to the change that he had boyfriend who loved him and wasn’t embarrassed by him in any way.

Things that Kurt had tried to suppress about his behavior slipped out in his overexcitement, but never once did Sebastian call him out for any of the things that brought attention to him in some way. More often than not, Kurt’s overexcitement earned him even more PDA in the form of hand squeezes or side hugs if Sebastian had his arm wrapped around him already.

By the middle of the afternoon, they had reached a comfortable balance. Kurt stopped feeling the need to thank Sebastian incessantly and they were both enjoying the physical affection they were sharing with each other.

They walked across Pont Neuf hand in hand. Kurt stopped near the center of the northern part of the bridge and walked to one of the half-turret shaped areas and looked out across the Seine. Sebastian wrapped his arm around Kurt’s waist. Kurt shifted his weight and leaned into him.

After a few minutes of silence, Sebastian asked, “What are you thinking about?”

“You, me, us, Paris, New York, school, Broadway…”

“That’s a lot of stuff to think about all at once.”

“It is. What if what I thought I always wanted isn’t what I want anymore? How do people know when to change directions in life? What if I still want what I wanted, but now I want something else too? And they’re not simultaneously achievable? How long do I strive to make my dream a reality before I move on to something that I hadn’t originally considered, but now appeals to me? So many questions.”

“You mentioned me and us. We aren’t one of your questions are we?”

“No, mon ami. No.” Kurt turned and faced him. He put one hand on Sebastian’s waist and the other on his neck right below his ear. He ran his thumb along Sebastian’s check. “You’re one of the answers. You and Sam and Adam helped me heal. You and Sam showed me that some people do really mean it when they apologize. You both showed me that I could learn to trust again. And
Adam showed me that there are people in the world who love freely and I aspire to be like that – to get to the point where I can live unguarded with new people I meet. He really sees the good in everyone and sees them as a potential friend and it’s not because his life has been only sunshine and puppies. And he does it without losing who he is or letting people walk all over him. Anyway, no, my questions aren’t about us in the sense of should there be an ‘us’. My questions are all about how to move from student to non-student. I think it’s just this last bit of weight on me with our last year of school starting when we go back. There are so many things to consider, but I’m also trying to focus on our time here rather than let those other things push their way to the forefront of my mind.”

“I can understand that. We’re at this crossroads between finishing school and starting the professional part of our lives. I worked my butt off for a payout that didn’t happen, but the final outcome is workable. I will have to rely on the money I make working as Cassie’s TA to pay for everything. I haven’t even taken the time to calculate whether I can do that. You’ve worked really hard to accomplish your goal, and you’re facing the same thing in a way. You’re wondering whether there will be a payout for all of your hard work. And your school requirements are becoming more time consuming this year, so you have to figure out whether you can live working so few hours. I think rather than pushing all of that down, maybe we should try to compartmentalize it. Actually set aside a block of time, maybe Sunday morning to actually work on our budgets. That way we will feel settled about that and we can enjoy our time without having that nagging feeling in the back of our mind anymore. We can tackle the immediate concerns and deal with them.”

“That’s a good idea.”

“Please go back to what you were telling me.”

“You’re one of the answers is because I’ve really struggled with never being ‘just right’. I’ve always been too much or not enough. And I don’t feel that way with you. You’ve taken all of my eccentricities in stride and not only did you refrain from teasing me about them, you joined in a lot of the time. I’m nowhere nearly as good a dancer as you, but you never criticized my silly penchant for belly dancing. You do it with me and we have fun.”

“We do have fun. You’re fun. You like to try interesting things.” He leaned in and kissed Kurt.

“With you I feel ‘just right’.”

He kissed Kurt again. “You are just right.”

He looked out toward the Seine. “Maybe the water and boats explain it better. It feels like I’ve grown up at sea. Sometimes the water was calm, but that was rare and even during those calm times, the boat still rocked and I had to work to maintain my footing. And then there were storms – lots of storms. During the storms, all I could do was focus on surviving. And the times when I thought I’d survive better by changing boats, I was still on a boat. Different boats weather storms differently, but there’s still no solid footing. Dalton promised better shelter from storms. New York felt like the pinnacle of accepting places, but it was still a boat. I still ended up in the hospital. I brought my crappy crew with me, not realizing that they were part of why my boat always rocked so much. Being here with you feels like I’m on land. And I know that every place has negatives, but last night was more surreal that I was able to verbalize. Even after one evening, I can see how utterly miserable being sent to Ohio was. I went to Dalton as a junior transfer. It wasn’t the bastion of love and acceptance I had thought it would be. No one was mean, but the opposite of mean isn’t accepting, it’s apathetic. I’m talking too much. I’m sorry. Let’s walk the rest of the way across to the Île de la Cité.”
“Hey, no.” Sebastian reached out for him when he started to step away. “Don’t stop. I think you need to get this out.” He moved closer to Kurt and put his hands on Kurt’s waist.

“So, my boat analogy. When Sam and Mercedes kidnapped me and I began to see what I had let myself get caught up in, they were sort of like the Coast Guard saving me from a head-on collision with an iceberg, which would have eventually caused me to drown. Moving in with you and cutting contact with nearly everyone was like almost getting the little boat they tossed out for me close to a pier in an area with virtually no water movement, but Blaine showing up randomly was like having someone drop big rocks in the water, making my boat rock again. Every time I’d get my footing and row the boat and almost reach the pier, a large rock would splash in causing me to slip back a bit and drop an oar. You and Sam and Adam would get in the boat with me and help me row, but you all had your own lives up on the pier. But when you told me how you felt, it was like you swimming out to me again, but this time rather than getting in the boat with me to row again, you called to me to get out of the boat and jump into the water with you and trust that you could help me swim to the pier, but I’d have to leave the boat behind. And when I finally jumped, I floundered for a couple of days. But you were calm and kept reminding me that you were swimming alongside me and wouldn’t let me get pulled under. I just needed to relax. I finally managed to do it and you climbed up onto the pier and helped me up. And we were on land for a few days and we came here. It’s amazing to walk on land, but it still feels surreal, like I’ll do something and I’ll get shoved back into the water. Completely different analogy – meeting your family was kind of like finding an actual oasis in the desert after encountering nearly a lifetime of mirages.”

Sebastian nodded and hugged Kurt. “I’ll do everything in my power to keep anyone from being able to shove you back into the water.”

“I know, but maybe my ridiculous analogy helps you see why I kept thanking you repeatedly. My counselor was sort of like this virtual swim instructor. Teaching me all of these ways to keep my boat from tipping, how to row more efficiently, and how to swim, but you reaching out gave me the courage to jump out of the boat and try out everything I had learned.”

“I’m glad. And you’re right about me leaving here and being sent to Ohio. Perfect American accent aside, I didn’t know any more about being American than you know about being French, despite your command of the language. I was awful to a few people, but I learned. Seeing a therapist helped me figure myself out. Connecting with Isabelle made a big difference. Having just one adult who cared that I existed and lived close enough to check up on me made a big difference. Now, we have Grandma as well. But after I was here in December, you know that I got my act together and began to correspond and Skype with my family here and I reconnected with all of them. And now I feel like I’ve come home. But my home is also with you in our apartment in New York.”

“Mine too. I think it’s the first place that has that feeling to it since my dad and I moved out of the house he, my mom, and I lived in.” Kurt kissed him. “Let’s walk the rest of the way across the bridge. We can still talk. I’m not going to solve my issues standing out and staring into the distance and watching the boats. Thanks for listening to my ramblings though.”

“We listen to each other. We have been for ages. Being boyfriends won’t change that.”

“I’m glad.”

They walked all around the Île de la Cité and continued to talk, both about what they were seeing and other things going on in their lives.

“I mentioned my lack of understanding of US mating rituals where both people hide who they are
while supposedly trying to figure out their compatibility.” He squeezed Kurt’s hand. “I’m pretty
sure you already know this, but I want to make sure. Just because I realized that I wanted to be
more than your best friend in the spring, doesn’t mean that I turned on my ‘fool Kurt about who I
am’ persona. I didn’t play act and I haven’t been attempting to deceive you to make you think that I
am somehow different than I am for the last several months.”

“I didn’t think you had.”

“Good. Actually, I did the opposite. I made sure to do my best to show you the real me in hopes
that you would actually like the real me enough to want to be with me.”

“And I do like the real you. A lot.” He squeezed Sebastian’s hand.

“I don’t believe that a relationship built on a façade can weather the storms of life. And now that
we are together, I don’t want you to feel the need to slip some kind of mask on and hide yourself
from me to keep me happy. I love you. All of you. Your giggling. Your tears. Of course I’m not
happy when you cry, but I feel honored that you trust me enough to let me see the real you that
Again, I’m not happy that your anxious, but I’m glad that you let me see that very real side of you
that you struggle with. Your kindness. Your strength to keep going with things are hard. Your
determination. All of those things, and a hundred others, are things I want you to feel free to
express around me. I want you to feel safe enough to remain open and honest.”

“I do feel safe with you.”

“Please don’t ever shut me out. You asked me not to deny you affection when I get aggravated
about something. I’m asking you not to say ‘nothing’ when I ask you what’s bothering you. You
can tell me that you don’t know how to explain it or maybe you can’t even identify why you’re so
upset at that very moment, but tell me that. Don’t shut me out.”

“Shutting people out is my default setting, which you know. That’s why this is so important to you.
You’re a really good listener. You don’t tell me I’m being ridiculous or attempt to offer me
solutions without actually listening carefully. I will do my best not to, and if I fall back into default,
just remind me gently.”

“I will.”

“So our method of conflict resolution and problem solving is going to be snuggle and talk it out?”

“Kissing too.”

Kurt laughed. “Kissing too. Come here.” Kurt pulled Sebastian over closer to the edge, out of the
walkway and kissed him. “Kissing is for all the time.” He kissed him again. “Lots and lots of
kissing.”

Sebastian laughed and smiled at Kurt’s antics. “Agreed. Lots of kissing.”

When they got to the east end, they reached their final tourist area – Notre Dame. They looked
around outside and then went inside and looked around. After they had looked at everything they
wanted to see, they sat down and rested. Kurt closed his eyes and relaxed. After about 10 minutes,
he opened his eyes. Sebastian noticed and reached for his hand. Kurt took it and smiled. He stood
and led Sebastian back outside. They crossed the nearest bridge and waited at the bus stop.

“I’m not religious, but the calm inside the cathedral was spectacular. I can totally understand how
people living stressful lives and fighting for survival every day would want to visit a place like that
once a week and feel the calm and recharge in a way. And I can see how the stories that Jesus told
about farmers and fisherman and everyday people appealed to the masses. The hope of eternal
glory helps people suffer through their earthly lives. Jesus didn’t glorify the rich or the overlords. I
can see why people would be drawn to that. Even I could be drawn to that, but modern day
Christianity doesn’t seem to have much to do with what Jesus taught. But the draw of the calm is
still there in the cathedrals.”

“The beauty and calmness does distract from the ugly things in the world. But you’re right, it
would be a nicer world if more people actually did the things he taught, not that I’m religious
either, but I did read the four gospels for a class one time. I was honestly surprised by what I read.”

The bus pulled up and they got back on. They climbed up to the upper level so they could enjoy
the view. They continued on their sightseeing through the center of Paris.

They got back to Sebastian’s aunt’s place around 8:00. They sat around and talked to Sebastian’s
aunt and uncle and cousins for a while before they headed off to shower and go to bed. With a
smaller crowd it was easier to talk.

They lay facing each other in the dark, with their arms crossing over each other and their hands on
the other’s hip.

“I had a fabulous time today. I loved seeing everything with you.”

“I loved showing my city off to someone so appreciative of the history. It was an awesome first
day. Tomorrow after lunch, we’re heading out of town for a few days.”

“Okay.” Kurt moved his hand from Sebastian’s hip up to his hair and ran his fingers through it,
causing Sebastian to nearly purr.

“That always feels so good. Kiss me too?”

Kurt scooted a little closer and kissed him. Slow and passionate. “You can sleep on me, if you
want.”

“You don’t sleep as well that way.”

“The only way I’ll get better at it is doing it more frequently.”

“We’ll work on it, but not tonight. I want both of us to be rested tomorrow morning because we’re
getting up early. Let’s try it again one night when we can sleep in the next morning.”

“Okay. Turn over then, so I can be the big spoon.”

“One more kiss.”

“One more.”

The next morning, they took their packs with them and headed to the prefecture to inquire about
information on Kurt’s mother’s family. His birth certificate had a line requiring her to include her
place of birth, which was their only clue as to where to start. Sebastian had done research online
while Kurt was at work the week before, so he knew which one to go to.
The news Kurt received surprised him. His mother had registered his birth. His belief that his grandparents were deceased wasn’t true. At least there had been no filing of death certificates for them. Kurt allowed them to copy his mother’s death certificate to include in her file.

Kurt pulled Sebastian over to a bench in the waiting area. “Did I understand right? I can get French National ID card?”

“That’s what I understood him to say. I can’t say that I know anything about citizenship laws beyond the basics that being born here doesn’t make someone automatically a citizen like it does in the US. And becoming a naturalized citizen is a pain in the neck. Oh, and that people can have dual citizenship. I do. And from what the clerk just told us, you do too. Do you want to fill out the paperwork and apply for your ID card?”

“How would it be helpful?”

“Free college, the ability to own land, and let me think… the ability to travel freely in the EU and stay and work in any EU country of any length of time. I’m not really sure what else. But we can go talk to someone if you want.”

“Would it allow me to live here with you more easily?”

“Definitely. As an American you can come here just using your passport for short stays, but to stay longer, you’d have to apply for a Visa and I don’t know much about that either. I heard adults talk about before I left. There were rules about how long someone could stay and having to return back to their home country for a certain amount of time. But of course, I don’t know if that was just for a specific situation or what.”

“I’ll go get back in line to talk to someone. Come with me?”

“Sure.”

Staying at the prefecture made them run late, so instead of eating a nice lunch out, they grabbed a few snacks and picked up the car that Sebastian had rented. Kurt enjoyed seeing the city as Sebastian drove out of town. Kurt hadn’t said much since they left the prefecture.

“I’m not shutting you out. I promise. I’m here. I’m enjoying the view out the window and just being with you. I don’t know what to think. I’m leaning towards just letting it be. We didn’t move from our original house until the end of 2010. And our mailman would have forwarded a letter after that himself, even once the initial forwarding time had passed. My dad didn’t move out of Lima until the end of 2014. If they are still actually alive, that gave them nearly 25 years to get in contact with her. I’m not sure that I want to meet people who ignored their daughter for over 20 years. Think about your father. If you have kids some day, would you want them to go looking for him when they’re adults? What would the purpose be? It just seems like dredging up something that people wanted to bury. I mean I can’t see any situation in which your father would want anything to do with your future children.”

“I see your point. But what if it was the other way around? What if it was your mother that cut ties with them?”

“Wouldn’t they still have had something to do with it though? I can’t see my mother cutting ties with decent people. I wish my dad told me more about everything. Maybe he doesn’t even know. I mean he knew I was coming here and that I was going to look into finding any potential relatives if
I could do it relatively easily. He didn’t warn me off or tell me not to bother. He believes that my grandparents are dead.”

“And for all we know they could be. They could have died in Germany or Brussels or the UK. Maybe their death certificates were never sent to the prefecture where we went. There are lots of them across the country. You have the documentation to request an inquiry into their status. You could do that when we get back. Then you’ll have the answer to all of it. If the inquiry doesn’t find evidence of death certificates anywhere, then you’re back to where you are now.”

“I’ll think about it. Where exactly are we going? Is it a castle?”

“Ma-ay-be-e.”

“It is.” Kurt bit his lower lip. “This is going to be so cool.”

“Adorable. This is going to be so much fun with you.”

“How long is the ride?”

“About another two hours I think. I checked into train tickets and there aren’t any trains directly to the area we’re going to and renting this car cost less than $150 for five days. It would have been a lot more for train tickets and taxi rides. I didn’t want to get there and mess with local bus services only to end up having to try to find alternate transportation. Do they even have Uber in quaint French villages?”

Kurt laughed. “So are you really going to keep the whole plan a secret or are you going to tell me?”

“Well, today we’re going to Montrésor. From there we’ll be going to five other places. I have hotel rooms booked. Nothing fancy this trip.”

“I don’t need fancy. You do know that right? I would have said yes the evening of your birthday even if we had to spend last week finding a shoebox to move our stuff into that had to be cleaned from top to bottom and we only had a bed to sleep on until we could save up for other furniture.”

“Well, as glad as I am that you feel that way, I’m glad we’ll be going back to our apartment instead. I don’t mean to sound greedy or anything because I would live in a shoebox with you, but it would make it hard for Sam to come on the weekends or for anyone to stay with us, like your parents. You know that now once we get back, they could come stay with us. Sam can sleep on the couch on Saturday night if they come on a weekend.”

“I hadn’t really thought about it. Work was hectic training my new co-PA. And we were working to come here. But I’ll talk to them about it. Did you end up blocking anyone over changing your Facebook status?”

“No, but I don’t have that many friends. I did have one surprising comment.”

“From who?”

“Puck. He sent me a friend request after you posted those pictures from your birthday.”

“What did he say?”

“He said I must have finally learned something by going to a posh school because anyone with two working eyes and a lick of sense would know that you are way hotter than Blaine.”
“He did not.”

“He did. Is he bi?”

“Not that I know of, but he called himself a sex shark. He also just likes to rattle people’s chains.”

“Did you end up getting any comments?”

“I did, but I deleted, unfriended, and blocked one person. I’m thinking of just deleting everything again and deactivating my account. I reactivated it two months ago and it hasn’t changed my lack of interaction with any of the people who accepted my friend requests. I might keep my Instagram account and set it to private and just allow our families to be able to see the photos. And I’ll keep everything I post to the realm of things that would not tank my performing career if they ended up all over the internet in five years.”

“Do you want me to deactivate mine?”

“No. I just don’t think it’s for me. I won’t allow nudes to be taken of me either, if you had been hoping for that.”

“Nope. Someday I’ll get to experience that in person, without any need for photos.”

“You think so, do you?” Kurt smiled, wishing he could tickle Sebastian, but he was driving.

“Well, I’m hoping so.” He squeezed Kurt’s knee briefly.

When they got to Montrésor, they parked, and stretched before they went in the hotel. They checked in and went to their room, which was barely larger than the bed, but it had its own bathroom and a bed was the only other thing they needed.

They took turns in the bathroom quickly. After Sebastian came out, Kurt went back in and splashed some water on his face. Once he came back out of the bathroom, Sebastian wrapped his arms around him and kissed him soundly. “You and that bed are very tempting.”

“Castle. You brought us here to see a castle. The bed will be here waiting for us.” He kissed down Sebastian’s neck just a little.

Sebastian’s breath hitched. “You can’t do that if you want to leave this room.”

“Just a preview for when we get back.” He pecked Sebastian on the lips and stepped towards the door.

“You’re a tease.”

“Oh, no. No teasing. Just a bit of delayed gratification.”

Sebastian laughed. “Only you.”

“Yep. Only me. Come on and let’s go see the castle.”

They enjoyed their walk and looked around as they made their way to their destination.

“This is like stepping back in time. It’s just amazing. I’ve only been here not even two days and I don’t want to leave. Can we hold hands here or will it cause a problem?”
“In the rural areas, there’s less PDA in general, so all that hugging and kissing you saw in Paris won’t be something you’ll see the people who live here do, but this area draws quite a few tourists, so unless we start crossing the line into making out, I don’t think it will be an issue at all.”

Kurt reached for his hand. “Good. I like holding your hand. I just can’t believe how magical it feels here. I’ve only ever seen this type of architecture in movies or small pictures in history books.” He looked around taking in everything he could.

They walked down a cobblestone road with houses along each side, all mostly pale sand colored to white with red clay colored roofs. Flowers in window boxes and blooming vines climbing the sides of the houses brought splashes of color all along the street. They veered off the main road area they were on and walked along a path that followed the river. They walked over a bridge with a small waterfall area under it. They eventually made their way towards the castle itself.

“I’ve wanted to spend time here in this general area for a long time. It’s just as beautiful as I had imagined. I’ve seen photos, good ones even, but in person it’s just magical like you said.”

When they got up to the castle, first they walked along the outside. They looked out over the area they had just walked through. After walking around the exterior, they went inside to view the rooms.

“Oh, wow. It’s not all cordoned off. We can actually get closer than 10 feet to everything,” Kurt said.

“These paintings are amazing.”

“The walls are all so dark and the wood ceiling in here is dark too, but it doesn’t feel dark in here. I’m so used to walls being painted light colors that I would have expected a different feel from so many dark and heavy colors. The ceilings are high, but still.”

“I’m sure the ceilings being high contributes to the chairs looking smaller, but they really are set low to the floor. We’re so much taller than the men back then. We’d look like we were sitting in kiddie chairs if we sat in one of those over by the fireplace near the piano.”

Kurt turned that direction. “You’re right. I would pay to be allowed to play one of those early 1800s pianos. They were new back then. Before then pianofortes had just five octaves of keys. The mechanisms were different and I’ve heard recordings, but playing one and hearing it in person would be really cool. The ones with the keys done the reverse look so weird.”

“I’ve seen pictures of those. They do look strange.”

They walked through all of the areas that were available for public viewing before they left. They walked back a different way that they had come, taking in more of the architecture and beautiful landscape on their way to a small restaurant that Sebastian had found online.

“Hopefully, it’s decent. It had good reviews and it’s supposedly affordable. I do have one nice dinner planned for us day after tomorrow.”

“Alright. As long as we eat, I’m good. You know I’m not picky.”

“I know.” Sebastian squeezed his hand.

After they finished eating, they walked away from the area and walked through a different part of
town for about a half-hour before turning back towards their hotel.

“I want to live here,” Kurt said. “One day here and I don’t want to leave. I’ve been infected with the beauty. How could you ever say you wanted to stay in New York after you graduate? I really don’t understand.”

“That’s the newness and vacation brain that’s getting a hold of you. We’re going to finish what we started because getting our Bachelor’s degrees is important. And next May we can revisit the topic of moving here instead of staying in New York.”

“My dad’s been to New York three times in the three years I’ve lived there. Once to tell me he had cancer and to stay a couple of days at Christmas. Once when I was in the hospital, he stayed for a couple of days. Carole’s been once when they came for my birthday this year. I think in total he may have stayed for a total of a week in three years. Surely we could afford plane tickets for the two of them to come here for a week or two every year or every other year to stay with us. Isabelle can afford to fly over here herself.”

“You’d miss the hustle and bustle.”

“I think I’ve just turned into a hamster on a wheel. And when I stop running, it feels wrong.”

“We’ll revisit this next spring. You can start working on your argument in favor of returning here though. You can get a new notebook and start figuring it all out.”

“You’d move back, even after you said you were staying?”

“Here, there, anywhere can be a place to write. I just need to actually get back to it and see if I can still do it and if it’s what I really want to do.”

They continued their walk back soaking in the fairy tale ambiance. When they got back to the hotel, Sebastian opened their room door and let Kurt in. He shut and locked the door behind them.

“Are we staying here again tomorrow night?”

“No, why?”

“Just so I can know whether to pack everything up tonight after I shower or whether to leave it out.”

“I don’t want you to feel like everything is anxiety inducing. We’ll be staying in a different hotel each night. I planned the itinerary so that we’d do the driving in the mornings, rather than travel in an unfamiliar area when it’s dusk or already dark. So, we’ll be staying in a hotel near wherever we’ve been that day, then getting up and driving to the next place each morning.”

“That makes sense. Do you want to shower first or second?”

“You take longer with your stuff afterwards, so why don’t you go first. That way you can work on it while I’m in the shower.”

Kurt grabbed his stuff from his suitcase and took it into the bathroom. Kurt went back in after Sebastian had gotten in the shower. Kurt had just start to fold up what he had been wearing and pull out an outfit for the next day when Sebastian came out. He stood on the opposite side of the bed to do the same. Kurt went back in the bathroom and carefully dried everything off and packed it back
in his toiletries bag. They stacked their bags on the small chair in the corner of the room and pulled the covers back accordion style since the room was a little warm still. Kurt turned the light off after Sebastian was in bed. He lay down tentatively on his side of the bed.

“Why are you way over there?”

“Are you sure about this?”

“Sure about what?”

“Us just sleeping in our underwear.”

“I’m sure. Is it bothering you?”

“No and yes.”

“I’ve seen you in similar attire before. Your biking shorts you wear to do yoga in aren’t much different than the boxer briefs you have on. The seams are in different places is about the only difference.”

“I know. The no comes from the fact that I’m actually okay with it. The yes comes from wondering why.”

“So, you’re not bothered by only wearing the boxer briefs, but your bothered by the fact that you’re not bothered.”

“Exactly.”

“Well that cleared up exactly nothing.”

Kurt laughed. He turned on his side towards Sebastian. He reached out for his hand. “I’ve only ever slept in pajamas. The loft was not the kind of place to sleep in my underwear.”

“I’d imagine not, but never?”

“Never. At first, it was just lounge pants and a t-shirt, but after Blaine and Sam moved in, I went from that to full-fledge 60’s style matching long-sleeved button-up pajama tops and bottoms.”

“Like Ricky Ricardo in I Love Lucy?”

“That’s the type. While it never felt comfortable to be so exposed before, I feel fine like this with you.”

“Scoot a little closer, please.” He waited, and then reached out and put his hand on Kurt’s shoulder. He ran his fingers soothingly down to his wrist.

Kurt interlaced their fingers. “I’m a very private person, which you already know, but we both like to tease and flirt. I just want to make sure that you know that I am not comfortable with other people knowing about our private life – our in-the-bedroom private life. I am open to discussing anything that you want to do or try and we can talk about who will do what, but I don’t want other people prying into what we do. Not that we hang around with anyone who would ask, but I just wanted you to know how I feel about it.”

“I agree. I may be a shameless flirt with you when we are in public or private. I may proposition you non-stop in private, but if other people are around, I’ll keep it pg. I don’t want to embarrass you. I don’t want you to become inhibited in the bedroom because you think I’ll some how use
something we’ve done together in a public setting to boost my ego or to degrade you in some way or to make you feel inadequate or anything. And I think I know a little of what you’re referring to. I’ve see guy mime things about the size of their girlfriend’s boobs or their boyfriend’s dick, while telling jokes or whatever.”

“That would bother me less than joking about me being good on my knees and things like that. I was repeatedly cast into the submissive role as part of the verbal bullying. So, implying that will not be funny to me in a social setting.”

“I would never. I consider us to be equals. I’d honestly be inclined to brag about how totally gorgeous you are and highlight all of the things about you that drive me wild. And touting your prowess, not minimizing it.”

“But you won’t?”

“No. I’m a private person too. I’ll keep all my lewd and totally true remarks about your total sexiness between the two of us. I can tell you’re rolling your eyes. Stop that. I thought I had gotten through to you about what you do to me, but obviously not.”

“No, you did. But I also told you that it would take hearing it a lot before it sinks in.”

“You did. I’ll get started on that then. Scoot closer.” He waited. “Your eyes change color. I haven’t determined yet whether it’s based on whether you’re physically hot or cold or whether it’s based on how you feel emotionally or how you feel physically or if it’s just random. I’ll figure it out in time because I love looking into your eyes.”

Kurt scooted closer and kissed him, drawing him into a passionate kiss and moving to kiss along the edge of his jaw and then down his neck. Sebastian’s breathing hitched. Kurt made a bold move and straddled Sebastian on his hands and knees without putting any weight on him and continued to kiss and lick his neck. He didn’t suck or bite, so he wouldn’t leave any marks.

“I want to touch you. Can I?”

“Mmm hmm,” Kurt mumbled as he continued to kiss his neck.

Sebastian placed his hands on the back of Kurt’s thighs and ran his fingers along the exposed skin.

“Bas!”

“Too much?”

“No, just an unexpected location and it just feels so good.”

“Good – because I love touching you and making you feel good.”

Kurt went back to kissing Sebastian’s neck, causing him to lose the power to speak coherently. Kurt continued to kiss down his left arm and back up. He kissed across his collarbone and down and back up his right arm. He paused when he got back up to Sebastian’s neck. “You do like this, right?”

“Oh, yeah.”

“Just checking.” He kissed down Sebastian’s chest. He switched and sat up in a kneeling position and began to run his hand all over Sebastian’s torso and arms.
Sebastian moved his hands to Kurt’s hips when he repositioned himself. “If we don’t slow down, I’m going to want to do more than kiss.”

“Me too. It’s … I understand so much more. I never understood.” He leaned forward and slid his forearms under Sebastian’s shoulders and put some of his weight on his forearms and elbows and began to kiss Sebastian again. “I just want you so much.” He kissed Sebastian like he needed to do it to survive. “I love you, Bas.”

“I love you too.” He slid his arms up to Kurt’s back and caressed him. “We can slow this down and go to sleep and talk about it tomorrow when we’re not so worked up already. I don’t want you to regret anything between us.”

Kurt kissed him one last time. “Turn on your side and I’ll big the big spoon.”

They repositioned and snuggled up.

“Is where we’re going a long drive?”

“Nope. About 20 minutes. We’ll eat when we get there.”

When they drove into the area, Kurt said, “Oh, wow. This looks completely different from Montrésor. Loches looks like what a lot of the government buildings I saw in DC.”

Sebastian found a place for them to park. They got out and took a walking tour of the area and found a place to get some breakfast while they were out walking.

“It’s older, isn’t it?” Kurt asked.

“Yes. Some of this was built in the 11th century I think.”

“You can see how architectural trends came into play. Some of the places do look like Montrésor, but some of them look like there was a lot of German influence at one point. Other things look Italian influenced.”

They visited the château and walked around a little more before leaving and driving to Chenonceaux, which was much different than the other two places they had been because the château was set up much more like a traditional museum.

They picked up the audio tour and walked through listening to all of the detailed information about the construction, the furnishings, the artwork, and the people who had lived in the château through the centuries. An extension off the side of the castle was actually a bridge that spanned the river, and had been used as ballroom. They didn’t speak much while they were inside because of their focus on the audio tour they were listening to. They looked around at areas that had interested them again before they left. They walked around the grounds for a while.

Kurt said, “I can’t imagine having the nerve to hang a huge painting of my three mistresses in my castle. Well I can’t imagine having mistresses in the first place, but it would just be so weird. I wonder if his wife ever knew who the three women were.”

“I think it would be really weird too. Things were really different then though. No one of that social or political rank married for love. Everything was about keeping power and land in the hands of the elite.”
“Everything is still about keeping power and land in the hands of the elite. How many Dalton
students faced what you did. I’m certain there were quite a few. ‘Do what I say or else.’ seemed
pretty typical there. There wasn’t a lot of thinking outside the box. And wealthy men still have
mistresses. I mean former President Clinton got himself in a lot of hot water over having one.”

“I think that back then it was acceptable though. I doubt anyone thought of dethroning any of the
monarchs or kings because they had multiple mistresses.”

“No checks and balances,” Kurt teased. “I’m sure whoever had the nerve to say something about
the king’s sex life probably got guillotined or something.”

“I wouldn’t doubt it. Or they got moved to he worst possible job in the château.”

They detoured off the path they were on and went to walk through the labyrinth. Afterwards, they
headed back to the path and walked to the area where they had parked. They grabbed their packs
out of the car and walked to the hotel and checked in. Once they had freshened up, they left to go
the restaurant that Sebastian had chosen. It was still light out when they left, so they decided to
walk around the main area of the town.

“This is completely different from the other two places. This is more like a really small town in
Ohio. A small downtown area, and then free standing houses more spread apart with more green
space and then farmland beyond that.”

“And completely different architecture.”

“These places are geographically close, but maybe the time frame when they were built influenced
the different feel and layout? It’s making me curious though.”

There wasn’t as much to see, so they walked through the area more quickly than their walk the
evening before.

They decided to go ahead and shower even with how early it was. Once they were done, they
plopped down in the bed.

Sebastian said, “So last night, we agreed to talk today when we were less worked up, so as much as
I want to kiss you breathless, let’s talk first.”

“Okay.” He scooted closer to Sebastian and turned on his side.

Sebastian rolled over to face him. “So, things got pretty heated and we were both really worked up,
but you were clear when we first talked about wanting to take things slow, so we stopped and went
to sleep. Initially, you were pretty tense about the whole idea of us having sex.”

“Yeah. That was before we kissed. And I realized a lot of things over the not quite two weeks.”

“Such as?”

“Being with you sets me on fire in a way I didn’t know existed. And I want a lot of things I never
wanted before.”

Sebastian smiled and winked at him. He moved a little closer and kissed Kurt gently. “What kind
of things do you want?”
“You to touch me everywhere is the most unusual one. You’ve cured me of my nearly lifelong human contact avoidance issues. And I want it so bad. Being able to hold your hand a lot of the time is perfect. It’s like this feeling of peace just washes over me.”

“You’ve let Sam touch you. And Adam.”

“Yes, and they showed me that touch could be positive. And I’m okay with either one of them hugging me or holding my hand. But with you, it’s different. It’s amazing and it’s arousing. When you put your hands on the backs of my thighs last night – let’s just say that required some serious effort on my part not to just slide my knees back in the bed a bit and find the friction my body was craving. You mentioned us talking at first. Back almost two weeks ago, when I asked you what you expected as far as sex went, I was going to work on psyching myself into being ready to be what you needed. And I would have. But last night, I was talking myself out of stripping.”

“Oh, well, you shouldn’t have listened to yourself about that. Next time, you should ask my opinion, which of course will be that you should definitely strip. I’ll even help you and join you.”

Kurt laughed. “I feel confused because what I feel doesn’t match with anything I’ve felt before. It’s disorienting in a way, but it’s so strong. How does hearing all of this make you feel? What do you want to do at this point?”

“How it makes me feel is super hot that you feel like that about me. It makes me excited because that’s how I feel about you.”

“Really?”

“Oh, yeah. Shall I be really cheesy and sing to you?”

The way you make me feel.
You really turn me on.
You knock me off my feet.
My lonely days are gone.

“I guess I always felt like all those songs were hyperbole and metaphor. And now I feel the fever. You’re hot and I want you so bad.”

“I’m already yours. I’ll wait or move forward. I know you have regrets and I don’t ever want anything we do together to ever be one of them.”

Kurt rolled back onto his back and sat up. He looked toward the window and got out of bed. He went in the bathroom and grabbed something out of his toiletries bag. He walked over to the window and used the clothespin in his hand to clip the curtains closed in the middle. “No peeping Toms.”

“That’s a good idea.”

“It is for what I want to do.”

Sebastian waggled his eyebrows. “Do tell.”

“I’m going to stop second guessing myself and get the rest of the way undressed and get back in bed with you.”

Sebastian got up and took his boxer briefs off, put them on the bathroom sink to put on in the morning, and got back in the bed. Kurt left his in his pack. He stood facing away from the bed.
“Hey, it’s okay if you’ve changed your mind. I can go put mine back on.”

“No. I really want to do this.”

“Maybe it will make you feel better to know that I’ve never done this before either. Come get in bed.” He paused. “Although, the view from this side is quite nice.” He wolf whistled quietly.

Kurt laughed. “How about turn the light off for a minute? You can turn it back on once I’m in bed with you.”

The light went off. Kurt turned and walked to the bed. Once he was lying down, he pulled the sheet up over both of them. The light went back on.

“I just wanted to tell you that I did go get retested after I talked to Blaine. I always used condoms, but when he refused to tell me if he had been with anyone else after we had gotten back together, I went. Everything came back clean. I have the report back in the apartment in my health file.”

“I went with Sam when he went about a month ago or so. Mine was clean too.”

Kurt turned on his side. “Come closer.” He waited, and then he kissed Sebastian. They kissed and kissed until their nerves abated. “Can I move the sheet?”

Sebastian bent his knee and used his foot to pull the sheet down.

Kurt smiled. To keep himself from gawking, he started to kiss Sebastian again with the tiniest wisp of a kiss. He responded and their back and forth game ended with Sebastian kissing Kurt. When they broke apart, Kurt started kissing down Sebastian’s neck.

“Lie on me please,” Sebastian said, barely able to speak.

“Kiss me?” Kurt asked.

Sebastian tipped his head up and Kurt tipped his down for their lips to meet. “Anytime.”

“I don’t ever want to take a shower by myself ever again. That was amazingly hot and something I’d like to repeat, frequently.”

“Well, as it happens, I would very much like to join you whenever possible.” He kissed Kurt again. “Do you want to rearrange so we can kiss easier? I don’t think I can go a fourth time, if that’s what you’re hoping for.”

“I’m quite fine. Better than fine. I love you and I just want to kiss you, if you want to be kissed. I can lie here and pet you and you can go to sleep if you want.”

“I think we can do all of those things if we get ourselves positioned right. I want to be able to pet you too.”

The next morning, Sebastian drove them to Amboise. They visited the château, which had the most amazing double stone circular staircase and was beyond beautiful. After seeing everything inside, they rode bikes around the grounds, stopping in a secluded area to make out, rest for a while, and eat the lunch they had brought with them. Afterwards, they rode around in the paddleboats. They left in time to go to Clos Lucé to see where Leonardo DaVinci lived the last three years of his life.
They toured the living areas and enjoyed seeing all of the mechanical inventions that had been created using DaVinci’s drawings.

When they left, they went to the restaurant that Sebastian had chosen for their fancy meal for the week.

“I saw a video review of this place. It looked really good. I’m excited to try it.”

They were seated and started with their first course. Sebastian ordered escargot and Kurt ordered freshwater shrimp, which he had never even heard of. For their second course, Kurt ordered duck and Sebastian ordered lamb. They traded bites during both courses.

“I’ve liked everything so far,” Kurt said.

“Next is the cheese. It looked so good.”

Their server brought out a wooden tray, similar to the type used to serve breakfast in bed. In it she had 15 different kinds of cheeses, nearly half of which were goat cheeses. She put small portions of the ones they chose on their place. Sebastian let Kurt choose first and then he chose ones that Kurt had not. After she walked away, they sampled each other’s selections and enjoyed all of it.

“Next is the cheese. It looked so good.”

On their way back to the hotel, Kurt said, “That was delicious. Absolutely fantastic. Thank you for taking the time to find such a perfect place to eat.”

“You’re welcome. I enjoyed it too. It really was good.”

Once they were inside their room, Sebastian took Kurt by surprise by and pulled him close.

“Shower with me?”

“Now, or later.”

“Both maybe?”

Kurt backed him into the wall and started undressing him while kissing him.

“I’ll take that as a yes.”


Sebastian managed to flip their positions and pressed Kurt to the wall and started kissing his neck.

“Bas! Don’t stop.”

They eventually made it to the shower and into bed.

“So, the place we’re going today is the Château de Cheverny. The estate is huge. It has been lived in for the last six centuries by the same family. They still live there, but they opened it to the public back in the 1920’s. We’re getting a ticket to do everything. There’s an art gallery, the tour of the castle with all the amazing furniture and artwork. There’s a train, like at a zoo, and boats so that we can tour the grounds more easily. It has huge gardens. The pictures are amazing. I’m really excited. It’s a little longer drive though. About an hour. We’re heading back north at this point.”
Sebastian talked in more detail about the history of the castle and the area as they drove.

When they made it to bed that evening, Kurt said, “Cheverny was really amazing. I loved the suits of armor and how the had stuff from different eras out where it could be seen easily, like the clothing and the toys. It made it seem a lot more like a place someone could live. I can’t really imagine living in a place that large, but it was truly breathtakingly beautiful. It would be cool to live near gardens like that though. It’s like having your very own Central Park. Much more formal, but really cool.”

“The art museum section was really cool too. I would totally be willing to rent one of the rooms and live there. I’ve loved every place we’ve gone, even though none of them are really anything alike.”

“Me too. Where are we going tomorrow?”

“Château de Chambord. It’s the second biggest castle in France. It has so many rooms that no one could even visit all of them in one day. They have only have a portion of the rooms set up to see, but we’re going to take a behind the scenes tour to get to see some of the places that aren’t available to just browse on our own.”

“Sounds fun.”

“I think so too. Let’s sleep. Snuggle up tighter.”

“This place makes the last place look tiny,” Kurt said as the made their way to the entrance. Once they were inside, Kurt’s eyes grew wide. “Oh, wow. It’s fantastic. There are no words. Look at the ceiling. Look at that stairway. This is going to be amazing.”

Sebastian’s eye could not have been any brighter. He had a huge smile on his face as well. He took Kurt by the hand and got the tickets they needed. They took went on their behind the scenes tour and loved every minute of the two hours that it lasted.

They spent all of their time inside the castle this time. There were too many interesting things to see inside to spend any of their time touring the manicured gardens.

They spent the little over two hours that it took to get back to Paris talking about everything that had seen during the week.

“I am so glad we went. It really was every bit as cool as I thought it would be. Seeing the different styles, the different towns, everything,” Sebastian said.

“You did a great job planning everything. I had an amazing time. I’d love to go back to Montrésor and spend a week or two just staying there. It was so peaceful.”

“Something to consider for the future,” Sebastian said.
When they got back to Sebastian’s aunt and uncle’s home, Sebastian showered first. While he was showering, Kurt transferred all of the photos he had taken to DVDs, and sent a couple to his Dad and Carole, Isabelle, Sam, Adam, and Grandma Smythe. As soon as Kurt got in the shower, Sebastian took their clothes and put them in the washer and set up the drying racks in their room. When Sebastian’s phone timer went off, he and Kurt brought the clothes back and got everything hung up.

Once they finished, they turned the lights off and got into bed.

“What are we doing tomorrow?”

“Honestly, I’m not sure. Something with everyone.”

“Alright. Can you draw me a family tree when we get up in the morning?”

“Sure. I’ll even take pictures of each of them and put their names on them, if you want.”

“I think maybe just a family photo of each group would be good. You can take them after we get to wherever we’re going. It will be less conspicuous.”

“That sounds good.” Sebastian snuggled in tighter. “I’m so glad we went to see all those places. It was really amazing. And you being with me made it even better.”

“I loved each place. They were all so different, but totally amazing.” Kurt kissed him with a just barely there kiss. He was the one to kiss Sebastian for real after only a few back and forth feather kisses.

Sebastian laughed and kissed back.

“I know, I know. I need to relax, so I can fall asleep. But it’s all so exciting.”

“And you’re totally adorable.” Sebastian kissed him. “Would you relax if I gave you a massage?”

“Doubtful. I’d just want to put my hands all over you.”

“Sounds perfect.”

Kurt was wiggling his foot and then forced himself to stop. Sebastian chuckled silently, but Kurt could feel the movement.

“I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“Keeping you awake? Being annoying?”

“You’re definitely not annoying and staying awake with you is enjoyable. I happen to enjoy your company quite a lot.”

“If I get on your nerves, tell me, okay?”

“You’re not going to get on my nerves. You’re just really excited and it’s cute. Really. Put your lips
back on mine and that will give you something to do.”

This time it was Kurt that chuckled. “Mmm hmm. Such a sacrifice on your part.”

“It is. I mean, I could be counting sheep or counting backwards from 100, but I’m willing to offer my lips up for your benefit.”

“Such a noble thing to do on your part.”

“I thought so.”

Kurt kissed him. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“I know. Tell me a story.”

“What kind of story?”

“Any kind. Listening to you tell stories relaxes me.”

“Alright. Back in the 14th century…”

Saturday morning, Kurt woke up first. It was light out, but he had no other indication of the time. He turned as gently as he could to pick up his phone. It was 7:43.

Sebastian reached out and Kurt turned back over and laid his head back on Sebastian’s chest. He kissed the top of his head. “I’ll be right back.” He got up, left the room and came back with a notepad and a pen. He sat at the desk and began writing. About 10 minutes later, he got back in bed with Kurt. He lay down on his back and held the notepad where Kurt could see it.

“So, Lucille was Grandmère’s sister. She didn’t have any other siblings. Lucille married Armand. They had three kids: Louise, Celeste, and Laurent. Grandmère had my grandmother, Edith – her only child. Louise married Eugène and they had two kids: Marcus and Charles. Marcus married Emelie. They had Mathieu, who married Suzanne. They have Katriane, who is 6 and Émile, who is 9. Celeste married André and they had two kids: Odette, who married Edmund. They have Patrice and Noelle who are 23 and 21. Their son Tristan married Stella. They have two kids: Georges, who is 21 and Damien who is 17. Laurent married Vivienne. They had Yvonne, who is married to Corbin, and Margot, who is married to Jean. Yvonne has two kids: Marcel, who is 17 and Nadine, who is 16. Margot’s daughter Zara is also 16. Then the names you see underneath in parentheses are the spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends. Fernand and Joanna are married. So are Simone and Garren. Patrice and Leon are dating. And Georges is dating Violetta, who prefers to be called Letti.”

“So, all of the people you call aunts and uncles are not your aunts and uncles. They’re technically your maman’s cousins.”

“Correct, which is why I told you it was complicated last December. My grandparents, Edith and Lucas died not long after Lucille and Armand died. So, that was before Simone and everyone younger than her was born. Only Mathieu and Fernand ever met Lucille and Armand. Grandpère and Grandmère took over the role as grandparents for all of Great Aunt Louise, Great Aunt Celeste, and Great Uncle Laurent’s kids. And then the next generation saw them as their great grandparents, but everyone called them Grandpère and Grandmère and used other names for the grandparents,
the way people use words like nana and poppa. My grandmother Edith and Celeste were very close like sisters, so when my grandmother died, Celeste did her best to be there for my maman, but she went off to the US to go to college. Anyway, my maman raised me to call her mother’s second cousins my aunts and uncles because she was close to them like siblings, not cousins. Anyway, you can look at this family tree.”

“Thank you for explaining it. It makes a lot more sense now.”

“So, Great Aunt Celeste and Great Uncle André are the only ones who have a 3-bedroom place. Aunt Louise has Matthieu, Suzanne, and their kids staying on and off with them during August. And Uncle Laurent and Aunt Vivienne have Zara and Nadine staying with them on and off since it’s August. That’s how we wound up here in Aunt Odette’s old room. Thus, the feminine décor still in use for when Patrice and Noelle come to stay. Georges and Damien share Uncle Tristan’s old room.”

Kurt examined the paper carefully. “So, you have three sets of great aunts and uncles. And you have six sets of aunts and uncles. And 10 people you call cousins and technically all 30 of them are your cousins in some way that I don’t know the proper terms for. Plus the spouses, girlfriends, and boyfriends of the cousins, who you also call your cousins.”

“Exactly.” He got up and put the notepad back on the desk. He climbed back in bed. “And now they’re all your great aunts, great uncles, aunts, uncles, and cousins.”

“Thank you.” A few tears managed to escape. Kurt pushed away the past and thought about his present and smiled.

Sebastian reached out and used his thumb to wipe them away. He scooted closer and kissed Kurt’s cheek. He scooted even closer and pulled Kurt flush against him on their sides. He began to sing quietly in Kurt’s ear. He started with the second verse.

Don't give up.  
It’s just the hurt that you hide.  
When you’re lost inside, 
I, I’ll be there to find you.

Don’t give up  
Because you want to burn bright.  
If darkness blinds you, 
I, I will shine to guide you.

Everybody wants to be understood. 
Well, I can hear you.  
Everybody wants to be loved.  
Don’t give up  
Because you are loved.

You are loved.

Kurt relaxed in his arms and let himself be held. He let Sebastian comfort him in a way he had never let anyone. After Sebastian finished singing, he didn’t move. “I know it’s overwhelming. It’s okay. It’s okay to let them love you too. You don’t have to do anything to somehow earn it.” He rotated back just a little so they could be more comfortable. Kurt bent his knee and Sebastian wrapped his leg through the space. Kurt snuggled in so that his nose was pressed against the base of Sebastian’s neck. He breathed in Sebastian’s scent and let himself melt into Sebastian.
Barely above a whisper, he said, “I love you, Bas.”

Surprisingly, Kurt fell back asleep. And not long afterwards, Sebastian did as well. About 9:00, they were startled by Georges knocking on their door. “Time to get up, you two. We’re leaving in 30 minutes.”

Kurt sat up, and called out, “In 30 minutes?”

“Yes.”

Sebastian got up and opened the door and peeked out. “Where are we going?”

Georges stepped closer and answered quietly enough that Kurt didn’t hear the answer. Sebastian shut the door.

“So, where are we going?”

Sebastian walked over to the dresser and opened the top drawer. “A place called Aquaboulevard.” He held up two pairs of swim trunks. “Which ones do you want?”

“The blue pair with the red stripes.”

He tossed them to Kurt. “Then I’ll wear the green pair with the blue stripes.”

“We’ll have to change there. I didn’t bring any shoes that will work to wear with swim trunks.”

He opened the closet door. “Flip flops and t-shirts are in here.” He handed Kurt the red t-shirt and he put the blue one on. Both pairs of flip flops were blue.

Kurt slipped the t-shirt and flip flops on. “What else?”

“There’s a drawstring backpack with a waterproof pouch in it.”

Ten minutes later, they were ready to go and Sebastian had slipped the bag on. They ate a quick breakfast. Celeste drove and they rode in the back to pick Grandmère up. Everyone else had taken public transportation and would be meeting them.

“So what exactly is Aquaboulevard?”

“I’ll just let you ride in suspense. I’ve only been once when I was younger, just before I started high school.”

Kurt stuck his tongue out at Sebastian, who just laughed and squeezed his hand. Kurt looked out the window during the drive. When they pulled up, Sebastian helped Grandmère out of the car and into the building. Kurt grabbed their bag and the bag Celeste had packed out of the back and followed them in.

“Oh, wow. This is amazing. It’s huge,” Kurt said.

Grandmère said, “My, my, my. The kids told me how amazing this was and I just had to come. I’m glad I did. This is just lovely.”

They pulled some lounge chairs together and set up a little base camp in the Plage Antilles area. Grandmère took a spot in the middle where she had a good view of everything.

Once everything was settled, Celeste said, “Sebastian wants to take family photos, so group up.”
The three families divided up and posed. Sebastian used Kurt’s camera and photographed each group. He and Kurt knelt one on each side of Grandmère and Celeste took their picture. She managed to stop an employee and she asked her to take a picture of all of them. They all managed to arrange themselves to get in the shot. The employee took several in a row. Celeste stepped forward and thanked her.

Fernand, Joanna, Simone, Garren, Patrice, Leon, Noelle, Georges, Letti, Damien, Marcel, Nadine, Zara, Sebastian, and Kurt took off after the photo and headed to the water slides.

“This place is so much fun!” Kurt said. “I’ve never seen anything like it.”

Sebastian took his hand and pulled him close enough to wrap his arm around Kurt’s waist. “There are more things than just the slides. There’s a wave area where you can waterboard, um water ski? I don’t know it’s like a snowboard, but it’s designed to be used in water. It’s cool.”

“Sounds a little scary, but I’m game. What else?”

“There a Tarzan rope that you can grab and swing out over the water and drop from.”

“Sounds fun.”

“There’s a wave pool that simulates the ocean waves.”

“Nice.”

“We could try the sauna. I saw that on the list of things.”

“I’ve never been to a sauna.”

“Me neither.”

“And there’s mini golf.”

“That sounds fun too.”

“Let’s get in line. I want to go down all of the tubes.”

A few hours later, the group of 15, divided into three groups and played through the mini-golf course. Kurt and Sebastian teamed up with Georges, Letti, and Noelle. Kurt learned that Letti and Noelle had been best friends since they were six and that Noelle, Letti, Georges and Sebastian had all been close since Sebastian moved to France. The four of them were in the same class starting when Sebastian had been held back a grade a few months after he had moved to France. A couple of years into high school, Georges and Letti became a couple. They had been together for four years. All three of them had just finished college since a bachelor’s degree was a 3-year program in France.

While they were waiting for Sebastian and Georges to take their turns, Noelle said, “Sebastian said that you work for Vogue.”

“I do. Well, I work for the website. Sebastian’s father’s cousin, Isabelle, is my boss. I have to do some work for her while I’m here. This coming week actually.”

Letti asked, “What will you be doing?”
“I have to shadow four up-and-coming design students at design schools here in Paris – a half-day each. On Wednesday, I’ll go back with a photographer from the Vogue office here and get professional shots of whatever Isabelle picks from the photos I send her that I’ll take myself.”

“That sounds cool,” Letti said.

“I’ve never done an assignment like this, so it’s cool, but scary too. I’m excited, but nervous.”

Sebastian came to the area where the three of them were talking. “Nervous about what?”

Noelle answered, “His upcoming Vogue assignment.”

“Oh. You’ll do great. You know that Isabelle loves you. But you also know that she doesn’t give people jobs that they will mess up. She values order and excellence. And you’re good at what you do.”

Kurt smiled.

Georges made his way to where the rest of them were standing and they all took their next turns. As they made it through the course, Kurt, Noelle, Letti, and Georges learned quite a bit about each other. Kurt overheard Noelle talking to Sebastian.

“He’s really cute and sweet. And you’re obviously complete smitten. I’m glad for you. You deserve something good to happen. We were all so sad when you’re father stole you away from us. And I was glad when you started writing to all of us after New Year’s. We were hurt when you didn’t keep in contact, but then we realized when you came back in December that we should have been the ones to put forth more effort, but back then we were still dumb 17 year olds, caught up in feeling like the center of the universe like stupid teenagers. We still had everything and you were the one that had lost everything. I’m sorry, Sebastian.” She hugged him. “Can you forgive me? I know I told you I was sorry in an email, but it’s not the same. I want you to know I really mean it. I’m so glad you came home this summer. And you brought the most attractive American guy I’ve seen.” She winked at him.

“Well, that’s true. And yes, I forgave you ages ago.” He squeezed her before letting go. “What actually happened with Edan?”

“Oh, I thought I told you.”

“You said he moved.”

“Well, you know we just had the final year of school left. His dad took a job in Brussels and rather than stay with a relative or board some place and finish school here and go to university here, he opted to go with them. I didn’t, and I don’t, begrudge him wanting to be near his parents. I don’t want to live in Belgium. I’m Parisian through and through. I’m not moving out of Paris.”

Sebastian nodded.

“I loved him, or I was starting to, but obviously not enough to do long-distance for a year and then move to Belgium to be with him. We were still just hedging around the ‘Are we serious enough to be a couple?’ and the answer turned out to be no. You knew I liked him as more than a friend, but you and Georges and Letti were the only ones who knew. We all hung around together. He and I never kissed or anything. It was moving that direction, but I’m fine. I was sad, but not heartbroken. You’re not still hung up on Pascalle are you?”

“No, not at all. Kurt is a million times better match for me than he was. No hard feelings. I hope he
and his new husband are happy. But I love Kurt. It’s just different. Better. Everything is just better with Kurt.”

“I can tell. Why does he look like he’s going to cry sometimes, when I can clearly see that he is happy?”

“Rural Ohio is not like Paris. Suffice it to say that everyone’s open acceptance of him and us as a couple is not what he’s used to.”

“Oh. Small-minded bigots?”

“Exactly.”

Georges fussed at them. “Are you two ever going to take your shots?”

Noelle looked up. She moved onto the putting green and took her shot and missed. She tried again and made it. Sebastian went next. He got his on the first try. He grabbed both of their balls and handed hers to her and they followed the others to the next hole.

“What did you study, Noelle?” Kurt asked.

“I’m a librarian. Have you seen the enormous library?”

“I saw it from the Eiffel Tower, but not up close.”

“That’s where I work.”

“I bet that’s a really interesting place to work.”

“I think so.”

“What about you, Letti?”

“I’m an app developer for special education. I’ve already had a job lined up when I graduated. I’ve been working there for the past year part time, but now I’m working full time. I love it. France is so far behind in special education. It’s actually heartbreaking.”

“I don’t even know what kind of apps you would make.”

“They’ll be customer driven. Apps for people who are mute, but don’t have cognitive impairments. Apps for people who are deaf, but can read lips, but who need a way to communicate with hearing people. Apps for people with autism.”

“That’s really a good idea. I had never thought about any of that.”

“A lot of people don’t, but having the processing power of a computer in a device the size of a phone or tablet opens up the possibilities for people to participate in every day life that are being excluded right now. Georges is an early childhood teacher. He’ll be starting when classes start in September.”

Georges added, “Letti is being kind when she says that France is behind. We’re decades behind. While the US is using alternative methods to help people communicate and lead productive lives, France is still isolating special needs kids and giving them no real education, sometimes none at all – not even allowing them to be in school. We have to do better. Letti’s apps will be able to used with elderly people who have had strokes too.”
They continued to play through the course and talk. When they got to the end, they headed back to
their base to meet up for lunch.

After lunch, they tried out waveboarding, the wave pool, and they gave the rope swing a few tries.
They headed back to the tube slides before ending their afternoon in the sauna. By late afternoon,
everyone was ready to head home. Georges, Noelle, and Letti headed to Celeste’s place. After
Celeste dropped Grandmère off, she ordered a couple of pizzas and they picked them up on the
way back.

Georges, Noelle, and Letti showed up right after they got back with the pizzas. They sat around and
talked and ate. Once they finished, they each took quick showers and got dressed in pajamas.
Noelle loaned a set of Patrice’s pajamas to Letti that they kept at Celeste’s for impromptu
sleepovers at grandma’s.

Everyone was pretty tired. Celeste and André headed off to their room for the evening. Georges got
out a pack of cards and some games and they spent the evening playing games and talking more.
Noelle and Letti slept in the bedroom and Georges grabbed a sheet and a pillow and crashed on the
couch.

Kurt was on his side as the little spoon. “Listening to the three of them talk about what they’re new
jobs makes me feel really shallow and childish.”

Sebastian didn’t jump in, making assumptions about what Kurt meant. He gave Kurt time to
process his thoughts and explain himself. He placed a gentle kiss on Kurt’s shoulder and waited.

“I was ignored and silenced and told nobody wanted to hear what I had to say and that I was just
trying to show off. And in a way, I really was. I wanted attention. My dad loved me. He still loves
me. But he was a busy man. I spent a lot of time watching shows my mom liked. We had a lot of
VHS tapes from when she had been sick. My dad would pick them up at yard sales cheap to give
her something new to watch. I don’t know. I just feel like wanting to be a performer is really
childish and attention-seeking when I compare it to what Letti was talking about.”

“I can see that, but what I also see is completely different.”

“Different how?”

“All those old musicals you loved and that inspired you to want to perform, they took away the
pain for a while. They gave you joy. Wanting to be part of something that brings joy to people is
not childish. Performing because you want to walk down the street and have everyone recognize
you and say flattering things to you is not the same as performing because you love doing it and
because you want to put something positive into the world. I can’t really see you taking a role in a
show that glorifies doing bad things. As a performer, you can say no to roles that puts murderers or
rapists in a positive light. You can choose to take roles or not. With stage roles, you know what
you’re getting into. It’s not like TV where you can audition for a part that is described a certain
way and then two years into a show, the writers turn your character into a serial rapist or an
abusive boyfriend. Or they tell you your character is gay but closeted and will come out and date
one of the lead guys, and then four months into the season, they pair you up with a girl who
becomes your first of many female love interests on the show.”

“That’s true. With a stage production, the plot has already been determined and there aren’t a lot of
surprises like TV shows that go on for years.”

“I see you learning to do what you love to the best of your ability and wanting to use those skills to entertain people. Entertaining people is not childish. People need some joy and happiness in their lives or even thought-provoking entertainment. Issues can be brought up through an entertainment medium that the viewer might never have considered before. And even if all you did was make people laugh, that would be valuable. With as much sadness and despair as there is in the world, intentionally putting good things into the world isn’t childish. If you really think about it, those shows and the things you did like dancing and singing on your own, probably saved you and helped you make it through the really hard times. They weren’t useless. If they helped you, they probably helped other people.”

“That’s true. And I have actually thought about it from that perspective before, but I think it’s a little harder to see it that way now as we get to the point where it moves from idea to reality. Just because someone does something for a particular reason, doesn’t mean they keep doing it for the same reason. Motivation changes over time. I think hearing them talk just pushed me to re-evaluate mine again and it’s mixing in with my feelings of how much money I’ve invested into this. For a while, including last semester, my motivation to finish was purely driven by my absolute refusal to give up. Not being a quitter became my only reason to persevere – just to prove that I could make it. So, there’s a lot factors all swimming around in my head. Carole is offering to pay my tuition, but I could use that money and get an entirely new degree in a different field altogether. Will I learn enough in one year at NYADA to boost my auditioning skills enough to make it worth that kind of money? Too many questions, not enough answers and it’s because I was stubborn and determined not to let myself and my parents down by being a quitter when sometimes quitting is just making a turn at a fork in the road that leads to the right direction. I was so angry at Rachel for quitting NYADA, but she got Fanny and then this new role without a degree. Her co-star flunked out of UCLA.”

“I know it’s not the same because I don’t have to repay the money, but knowing how much money has been spent on me attending Columbia and to pay for the apartment is hard for me to deal with. You see how things are here. I didn’t grow up rich, but I didn’t grow up without what I needed. Two years of the cost of Dalton, plus the three years at Columbia plus the cost of the apartment and associated expenses would have been enough for me to live on for my whole life here. I could have bought a place of my own, written books, and never worked a salaried job ever. It’s an enormous amount of money. Yes, I’ve learned a lot at Columbia, but have I learned THAT much? I don’t know. It’s hard to quantify the value of knowledge.”

“It is. It’s late. We should try to sleep. We can continue this another time.” Kurt brought Sebastian’s hand up to his lips and kissed across his knuckles. “I had a lot of fun today. Your family is really awesome, to quote Sam.”

Sebastian laughed. “He does like that word quite a bit, but it’s appropriate. Our family is awesome.”

Kurt scooted back a little and closed the tiny gap between them. Sebastian kissed him on the neck again and took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

“I love you. I can’t even really describe how lying like this with you makes me feel. Maybe cherished is a good word for it.”

“I love you too, Bas. And I feel safe in your arms.”
Kurt felt Sebastian moving and reached for him. He rolled back toward Kurt and kissed him.

“I’ll be back. Just go back to sleep if you can.”

“Okay. You’re not sick are you?”

“No, not at all. I just need to go do something. You’ll see a little later.”

Kurt closed his eyes back and pulled Sebastian’s pillow down and wrapped his arms around it so he could try to sleep. Sebastian headed into the kitchen and quietly put some eggs on to boil. He stepped outside and sat on the stoop and Skyped Sam.

“Hey, what’s up?”

“We’re having a lot of fun, but I need to ask you something quick.”

“Isn’t it like 5:00 in the morning there?”

“A little after 5, yes. I’m making stuff to take on a picnic breakfast to that park you painted for me.”

“Cool. He’ll like that.”

“Tell me why he’s so emotional and on edge about my family being nice to him. I don’t want to dredge up bad memories, but I need to understand better.”

“Oh, that’s easy. Kurt only met Blaine’s mom and brother once. He never met his dad.”

“So, they were together for what? Nearly three years?”

“Yeah. Carole and Blaine’s mom met at the barn wedding.”

“That’s just so weird. I get it more now.”

“So your family likes him?”

“Definitely. Well, I mean, what’s there not to like? But yes. He gets along with everyone.”

“He’s probably just feeling like it’s a dream still. You haven’t been there that long and he’s dreamed of going to France for such a long time. And combine that with the change in your relationship with him, and then meeting a bunch of people who like him, it all probably feels pretty surreal. You and I are used to have supportive family members and having people like us or accept us into a group with no problems. He’s never had that, ever. He made a HUGE deal over me being a decent human being and treating him nice. Just give him some time to adjust, but don’t pull back. When he kept acting like it was so weird that I would want to be his friend, I just kept at it. Consistency. That’s the word. Just keep doing what you’re doing and eventually he’ll accept that it’s real. And then don’t screw it up like I did.”

“Got it. I have no intention of screwing it up. Thanks for the help. I need to get back inside and continue with my picnic prep.”

“Have fun.”

“I hope to.”

Sebastian disconnected and went back inside quietly. He made the egg salad, put it in a ziptop bag.
He washed the strawberries, cored them, and bagged them up as well. He put everything into a paper sack and left it on a shelf in the fridge. Once he finished, he went back and got in bed with Kurt, who was still holding his pillow. He was just barely sitting on the bed, contemplating how to lie down without disturbing Kurt when Kurt shoved his pillow up to the top of the bed and made grabby hands for him. Sebastian smiled. He lay down and Kurt turned him into a personal body pillow. Sebastian kissed the top of his head.

“I missed you.”

“I was only gone 30 minutes.”

“That’s 30 too many.” Kurt reach out and turned his face and kissed him. He pressed up in the bed and deepened the kiss. He kissed down his neck and back up, and then along his jaw.

Sebastian repositioned himself and pulled Kurt on top of him.

Kurt resisted. “We have to be quiet.”

“Shower?”

“So early?”

“I was planning on leave at 6:30. They already know. It’s 5:45.”

“Okay. But I don’t want to cause problems.”

“No problems. Come on.” He kept kissing Kurt. He rolled them over so that he was pinning Kurt to the bed. He started kissing and licking across his chest. Kurt started moaning.

“You have to let me up if we’re going to shower.”

Sebastian was breathing hard, and didn’t want to stop what he was doing, but he focused and pushed up and got out of the bed. He reached out to Kurt. They headed to the bathroom quietly. They undressed quickly and got in the shower. Sebastian started kissing him again as soon as they were in.

“Where are we going so early?” Kurt asked as he kissed across Sebastian’s shoulder.

“It’s a surprise.”

“Mmm. Okay.”

When they finished, they wrapped their towels around themselves and grabbed their pajamas and went back to their room. As soon as the door was shut and locked, Kurt snatched Sebastian’s towel and hung it up on the drying rack with his own. Sebastian started to laugh, but quickly caught himself and didn’t make any noise.

Kurt walked up to him and wrapped one arm around his neck and kissed him gently, and then took him completely by surprise by grabbing him bridal style. He carried him to the bed and plopped him down, and then quickly pinned him to the bed and started kissing him down his ribs. Sebastian was laughing so hard that he put his hand over his mouth to keep quiet, while using his other hand in an attempt to defend himself from being tickled, but only half-heartedly.

Kurt stopped and moved Sebastian’s hand and kissed him on the lips. “I love you. Let’s get dressed so you can take me wherever it is that we’re going.”
Sebastian was working to catch his breath. “You are – Oh, my God, I can’t breathe – I was not expecting that.”

“That is the point of a sneak attack, is it not?” Kurt kissed him again.

“It is. It definitely is. I’ll be on the lookout for sneak attacks from now on.”

“Ah, but I’m a ninja.”

“I wouldn’t doubt it.” He ran his hands down Kurt’s sides to his backside. “One very sexy ninja indeed.”

“If we don’t get dressed, we won’t be able to leave when you had planned to.”

“My plan versus you lying on me naked. You do not make things easy to choose between.”

“Well, then I’ll choose. Whatever you had planned was important enough for you to get up before the sun to set the plan in motion.” Kurt gave him a peck on the lips and got up and started to get dressed. He wiggled his hips a little more than necessary to lure Sebastian out of the bed.

Sebastian laughed and got up. He walked up behind Kurt and put his hands on his hips. “We need to go out dancing. I was always a gentleman when we danced before, but this time I think I’ll let myself be a little less of a gentleman, if that’s okay with you.” He turned Kurt in his arms and pulled him close and began to move his hips. Kurt followed along. “Meringue or salsa, something sexy. That’s our next activity together once we get back to the apartment. We’ll belly dance and get warmed up, and then we’ll dance together.”

“Mmm. Sounds hot.”

Sebastian finished tying his shoes. “It will be. Come out to the living room when you’re finished.”

They stopped at a bakery and bought fresh croissants and coffee. Sebastian grabbed a plastic knife and a few napkins and put them in the sack. They continued on their walk. Kurt put his arm around Sebastian’s waist since his hands were full. It didn’t take long for them to get to their destination.

It was just light enough out that Kurt recognized where they were. “It’s the park in the painting.”

“It is. Come on. Let’s sit over there and we can eat and watch the sun rise.” He opened the sack and handed Kurt the contents. Then, he carefully tore it open and laid it out on the table to use as a placemat. He opened the bag from the bakery and assembled to egg salad sandwiches for them and put them on napkins.

“You went to a lot of trouble to make me egg salad.”

“I know you like it a lot.”

“I do. And it’s really good on fresh croissants. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

“And you even got us a chocolate filled one to go with the strawberries. Mmm.” Kurt scooted closer to him and continued to eat and look to the east as pink began to tinge the horizon.

They had both finished their sandwiches by the time it was light enough to see their surroundings.
clearly. Sebastian pulled a strawberry out and fed it to Kurt, bringing a big smile to his face. He took one out and fed it to Sebastian. They went back and forth between feeding each other the strawberries and bites of the chocolate-filled croissant. After the last bite, Sebastian kissed him.

“Let’s move to a bench.” Sebastian grabbed up their trash and put it all in the bag the croissants had been in.

They sat down together on a bench. Sebastian put his arm on the back of the bench giving Kurt room to scoot closer, which he did.

“It’s peaceful here.” He looked around. “This is where you took the photo from.”

Sebastian nodded. “I sat here on this bench and read pretty often. Like you said, it’s peaceful here. I’d come early in the mornings on the weekend before other people were up. I’d stop by that bakery and get something. And then I’d come here and eat it, sometimes with coffee and sometimes with hot chocolate.”

They spent the next hour in silence, watching birds fly in and out of the area, watching the ducks in pond, and enjoying the view of the pond with the sun coming up fully over the horizon. Around 8:00, Sebastian squeezed Kurt’s shoulder, breaking him out of his gaze. Kurt turned to look at him and was met with a kiss. Kurt smiled.

“We need to head out to the Metro.” Sebastian stood up and held out a hand to Kurt.

“Where are we going?” He took Sebastian’s hand and instead of getting up, he pulled him closer and kissed him before he stood up.

They walked out of the park hand in hand. Sebastian dumped their trash out as they walked past a trashcan on the way to the Metro.

“I’m not exactly sure. Patrice has decided to take charge of your architectural informational needs while here in Paris. She’s the family’s expert on all things structure related. She has a tour planned for you today where she is going to regale you with her copious amounts of amassed information on how the amazing buildings around Paris were built and when and the architectural style and construction methods and all of the details. So, you have been forewarned. If you do not want to know the full answer to the question you are considering asking, do not ask.”

“Such as?”

“How on earth did they get that there?” Will be met with a very detailed description of the type of ladder, steps, or whatever that would have been built to reach the location, along with an equally detailed description of the type of lever, pulley, ramp, etc. that it would have required to move said object from the ground up to wherever it is. She will also know the amount of manpower and number of hours it would have taken to construct these things and then how many people it took to accomplish the task once the prerequisite items were in place to accomplish the task.”

“Oh, wow.”

“Walking encyclopedia. Not kidding one bit. She majored in something to do with architectural history and art. She works at the Louvre as an adjunct I’m-not-sure-what who gives presentations on all of the major historical sites in Paris. She’s brilliant. She completed her PhD back in May or June.”

“Isn’t she close in age with us? Maybe I’m remembering wrong.”
“You remembered right. She’s 23. She started university at 16.”

“That’s impressive.”

“So is the amount of information she has stored in her brain. Leon is older than she is by about three years I think. I found out yesterday that they are engaged and she moved in with him about a month ago. He works at the Louvre too. That’s where they met. She was giving some presentation about something and he was in the audience and stayed after to ask her questions. He works in restoration. And from what Noelle said, he finds her immense amount of knowledge sexy instead of irritating like all of the other guys she’s met over the years.”

Kurt laughed. “Well good for Patrice. Leon sounds like a keeper.”

“Noelle says they’re very happy together.”

“Have you not been writing back and forth with Patrice herself?”

“I have. But she’s not into discussing much of anything beyond her current interest. She and I get along fine, but she has no real interest in social chitchat, nor does she really enjoy ‘hanging out’. Georges, Letti, Noelle, and I never ignored Patrice and we’d get her to do a few things with us, but she was always more content to stay home and watch some history channel thing about ancient architecture or read books and design stuff.”

“So, her taking us out is a big deal to her?”

“Very much so. She’s letting us into her inner world of knowledge.”

“Well, this sounds intriguing.”

“We’ll just hope our brains don’t explode from information overload.”

“I’m sure she’s very interesting.”

“She is. How do you think I know so much about all of the places I’ve been telling you about? I mixed her information with more humanities-based history information to get a better picture of life in those times and places. She just really gets on some people’s nerves, like people not interested in history, art, or architecture. She manages to turn most every conversation topic back to one of those three topics. So, if you begin to discuss theater, she’ll slip in information about how theaters were originally designed and how they used design features to amplify the human voice naturally and so on.”

“It’s fine. I want to see wherever she’s taking us. And whatever she has to say about it will be new to me and interesting.”

They headed into the Metro station.

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They didn’t get back to Celeste’s place until after 8:00. She left food in the refrigerator for them. Sebastian put it in the oven to warm up. He started their laundry while he waited. Kurt ironed the clothes in their room and hung them in the closet. When he finished he came out to find André, Celeste, and Sebastian watching TV.

Letti and Noelle had gone home since they had to work the next day. Despite it being August, the two of them were new to their jobs and weren’t getting several weeks off until the following
summer. Georges had gone home as well since Sebastian and Kurt had plans and wouldn’t be around much.

Kurt heard the washer beep. He went to pull the clothes out and take them to their room to hang them up. When he came back out, Sebastian had plated their food. They sat down to eat together at the table. When they finished up, they cleaned everything up and put it away. They said their goodnights and headed to get ready for bed.

Once they’d showered and made sure that everything was ready for the next morning, they got in bed.

“I’m glad you’re going with me tomorrow.”

“I’m just going to make sure you get to where you’re going.”

“I know, but I don’t feel comfortable traveling around by myself yet. It’s like when I first moved to New York, but with the added lingering fear that I’ll say something wrong and upset someone or misunderstand directions to somewhere.”

“I’ll drop you off and pick you up. We’ll eat lunch together and we’ll go to the next place.”

“What are you going to do?”

“This and that. Look around, go to a bookstore or an art gallery or anything. I used to just hang around doing nothing in particular a lot. I don’t mind at all.”

“Okay. Today was amazing. You weren’t joking about the depths of Patrice’s knowledge. It was phenomenal. I’m glad she wanted to take me. She’s sweet and Leon is really nice. They make a good couple. He’s obviously still very taken by her immense knowledge. How long have they been together?”

“Three years I think. They hadn’t met when I left, so sometime after that. I like him too.”

“I need to try to sleep. Can I be the big spoon?”

“Of course. I know you still sleep best that way.”

“I like it when you’re the big spoon too. And I can sleep that way now. It still just feels more natural to sleep on my right side. We could try switching sides of the bed. I could sleep on my right side, but you could be the big spoon. We’ll try that tomorrow night, okay?”

“Sure.” He kissed Kurt before he turned over.

Kurt scooted up behind him and got comfortable quickly. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Tuesday evening Kurt skyped with Isabelle an hour after he had sent her all of the photos he had taken. She decided what pieces would be featured. The next morning, he went to the Vogue Paris office and met with the photographer and they headed to the design schools. The photography went smoothly and Kurt asked the follow up questions that Isabelle had wanted him to. At the end of the day, he went back to the office with the photographer. Kurt thanked him and he went back to his
office. Kurt was met by one of the PAs in the office and he was given a tour, as Isabelle had requested. When the tour was over, he thanked her and headed back outside. He walked past a florist shop, but then turned back. He went inside and bought a single red rose with some baby’s breath. From there he went to the Metro station and went back to Celeste’s place.

Kurt saw Sebastian sitting on the stoop before he saw Kurt coming down the sidewalk. He repositioned the flower behind his back to the side where Sebastian wouldn’t be able to see it. Once Sebastian saw him, he got up and started to walk down the sidewalk towards him. Before Sebastian got close enough to reach him, Kurt pulled the rose out and offered it to Sebastian.

“Aww. You brought me a rose. Thank you.” He put it up to his face and smelled it. “It’s beautiful, but not as beautiful as you.” He reached out for Kurt’s hand and took it. “I missed you.” He kissed him. “Dinner’s ready. Come on.”

“Did you cook for me?”

“I did. Well, the crockpot cooked it. I just prepped it earlier. I wasn’t sure exactly when you’d get here and I wanted to be able to eat when you did. So, how did the photo shoot go?” He smelled the rose again. When they got inside, he pulled a glass out and put the rose in some water.

Kurt told him about his whole day while they ate.

“I’m sorry to have to abandon you for the evening. I need to get the interviews for the article written up and sent to Isabelle tonight by 10:00 so that she has time to review them before she gets off and send them back to me if I need to add more or if she has questions.”

“It’s fine. I was going to ask you if you’d be okay with me leaving you here to work on it. I won’t stay out late.”

“Sure. I just need your laptop again.”

“It’s already set up on the desk in our room.”

“Thanks.” Kurt took his dishes to the sink and washed them. He took Sebastian’s from him and washed them as well.

Sebastian grabbed a towel and dried everything and put it away. He checked that the crockpot was on warm. “If Celeste and André don’t come back by 7:00, the food will need to be put away. She didn’t say anything about not coming home for dinner, but just in case.”

“Sure. I can do that.” He dried his hands and set an alarm on his phone. He wrapped his arms around Sebastian’s neck loosely. He kissed him and ran his fingers through the back of his hair. “I love you. I’ll be here when you get back.” He stepped back.

Sebastian closed the space again and kissed him, pressing in and licking at Kurt’s lower lip and deepening the kiss. “I love you too. I’ll be back in a little while.” He squeezed him and held him tight before he let go.

Celeste knocked on the open door. Kurt turned to look at her.

“Thanks to whichever one of you made dinner.”
“That was Sebastian. He had it ready when I got home.”

“What is he?”

“I don’t know. He said he needed to go out. I’m working on the interview transcripts. I’m not sure when he’ll be back. He just said that it wouldn’t be really late.”

“Alright. I saw the rose. I transferred it to a vase.”

“Thanks. I brought it for Sebastian, but he didn’t know where to find a vase.”

“I’ll let you get back to work.”

“Thanks for letting us stay here.”

“It’s our pleasure, really. Sebastian came home last Christmas and he was broken. It was our faults more than his, but we did try. He just didn’t write us back. We should have persisted. We mistakenly assumed that he had integrated well and that he didn’t want or need us in his life. And the exact opposite was true. But when he talked about you that was the only time he looked even remotely happy. And when he started writing to all of us again after he went back, a lot of what he wrote about were the things that you and Adam and Sam did together. We were really glad for him. He told us what happened with his father while you were gone yesterday. Such an awful man.” She shook her head in disgust. “But his father’s grandmother seems to have taken an interest now as evidenced by him coming here for the rest of the summer. And he’s obviously really happy with you. We’re so glad he’s found someone who loves him so much.”

Kurt smiled. “I do love him.”

She nodded and left him to finish his work.

By the time Sebastian came back, Kurt had sent the transcripts to Isabelle, but he hadn’t heard back from her. He used the time sending some photos to everyone he’d been keeping in contact with. Sebastian came in carrying a shopping bag, which he put on the dresser. He walked up behind Kurt and leaned over and kissed him on the neck. Kurt tipped his head up and offered him a kiss. He quickly accepted.

“How’s it going?”

“I’m just sending our friends and family some pictures and waiting to hear back from Isabelle. What’s in the shopping bag?”

“Something that was suggested to me. Do we have time to shower while you wait?”

“Sure.”

When they came back in the room, Sebastian shut and locked the door behind him so they could just wear their boxer briefs.

“So, tomorrow morning we’re going to pick up your ID and apply for a passport, which we will have sent to the French Embassy in New York to pick up since it won’t be ready before leave. After that, we’re flying out. That’s where I went – to a travel agency. I wasn’t comfortable doing it myself online with such a short time frame. And I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want to get your hopes up if I couldn’t get it worked out for this week.”
“So, where are we flying to?”

“Amsterdam.”

Kurt looked confused.

“When we were talking not long after school got out, back in May. You mentioned wanting to go to the Netherlands. We’re so close. I wanted to take you, even if it’s just for a couple of days.”

“Bas…”

“Yes, mon feu? I love you and I’ve never been either. I’m excited. The travel agent got us really cheap tickets to fly, so we’ll be there in no time. Our flight is right after lunch. We’ll be there by 1:30. We’ll check into our hotel and go out to see the sights. We’re staying until early Saturday morning.”

“And then what?”

“Do you want to know or do you want it to be a surprise?”

“I don’t know. I like to plan, but I like your surprises.”

“Well, you can think about it while we pack. We’ll need clothes for three days, plus an extra.”

“Okay.”

They spent the next 20 minutes packing everything they’d need.

“Are you going to show me what’s in the bag?”

“Oh, yeah. Of course.” He pulled out two travel fanny packs that were completely flat. “The travel agent recommended these. We can put all of our IDs and debit cards in them and the cash we take. They’re waterproof and have RFID protection, which keeps modern thieves from using handheld devices to steal our debit card information without getting anywhere near close enough to physically steal them. They loop over your belt and then they flip over and go under the edge of your pants. It has a zipper top that you can get into without taking your clothes off. Sebastian unbuckled his belt and slid it on to demonstrate.

“Seems like a good way to keep things safe, at least safe from pickpockets and cyber pickpockets.”

“She said that Amsterdam is pretty crowded this time of year with tourists and it’s better to be safe than sorry. Our phones fit in them as well. I also got a theft-proof strap for your camera.”

“Thank you.” Kurt heard his email ding. “I need to check that.” He sat down to read through what it said. “Well, that’s done. Isabelle said that what I sent was she needed. I’ll get acknowledged as the interviewer. It’s a start. My name is going to appear in something professional.”

“What did you think about the schools?”

“I loved every minute of it. If you made me place bets, mine would be that Isabelle arranged this for that very reason. She’s trying to lure me to the fashion world. She knows I love both and she’s trying to tip the scale to her side. She wanted me to see what I could be doing if I were to go to design school.”

“Would you like to go?”
“Of course.”

“Why did you choose musical theatre over design?”

“Because I love to perform. Some days I don’t know. We’ve had this same conversation 20 different ways. I was caught up in the dream. And the rug was pulled out from under me so many times, I think I eventually just lay down on the rug and held on as tight as I could. I don’t even know anymore.” He shut the computer down and closed the lid. “Let’s just go to sleep so we’re not tired tomorrow morning.”

By 2:30, they were leaving their hotel room and heading out into Amsterdam. Given the short duration of their stay, Sebastian had gotten canal tour tickets from the travel agency. Since they were short on time, Sebastian grabbed a cab and showed the driver the place he wanted to go on his phone.

“What is this place?” Kurt asked when they got out.

“It’s a museum of bags and purses.”

“That doesn’t really sound like something that would interest you.”

“I like history about all sorts of things. Let’s go. This building dates back to the 1660’s.”

They headed inside and found three floors of the most amazing and unusual bags, for both men and women, and purses. One of them was a working phone. They didn’t stop and have tea, but they did go look at the tea room just to see it. From there, they went to Rembrandthuis. They stopped at a couple of food carts and ate along the way. They walked from there to Oude Kerk.

“I love seeing the restored houses,” Sebastian said. “It makes these amazing famous people seem so much more real to see where they lived and worked and get a little glimpse into what their lives might have been like.”

“I like it too. It’s so different here than everywhere we’ve been. I think that’s the most surprising part. Not because I haven’t seen pictures of some of these places, but they’re all so close together physically, but so completely different. If you drive six hours from Paris in any direction there’s not really any architectural continuity. You can see how areas built up in isolation for centuries. We could drive from Lima to Chicago and see virtually the same small towns all the way there. Of course, if you go to New Mexico the architecture is different, but that’s really far from Ohio. Here just driving an hour leads to a completely different feeling. I like it.”

When they went inside Oude Kerk, Kurt’s surprise was written all over his face. “That organ. It’s fantastic. I’d love to come sometime when there’s an organ concert. I bet it’s magnificent.”

Sebastian squeezed his hand. “Maybe some day.”

From there they walked to the starting point of their canal tour and they spent the late afternoon and early evening seeing a lot of the famous sights and from the view of the canal.

Before it got dark, they headed back to their hotel, which was nothing like any hotel either of them had ever been in. The stairs up to their room were very steep and narrow. The room was more like a closet with a double bed inside. But it was clean and inexpensive. They ate once they got to the area where they were staying. They showered quickly and went to sleep.
The next morning, they got up early and headed out to spend the day exploring. They opted to spend most of the day outdoors after taking a guided tour of the Rijksmuseum. They went to the Jordaan neighborhood and wandered around. They went to a Foodhallen for lunch and bought a bunch of different things and shared them. They rented bikes and rode through areas stopping now and then to check out buildings or go inside shops.

They found a flea market and wandered through it. Kurt found a jacket he just had to have. It zipped asymmetrically and was definitely vintage. He found a second one in another stall that he was convinced that Sebastian needed. He just smiled and gave in and tried it on. They both left with funky vintage jackets.

They went to a place the travel agent had suggested for dinner that evening and ordered the rijsttafel. They were happily stuffed and headed back to their hotel afterwards.

After they were in bed, Kurt said, “This was so much fun. I can’t believe you were paying that much attention to what I said that day. I don’t even remember mentioning the Netherlands, even though I did want to come here.”

“You mentioned Machu Picchu as well, but that’s not within a few hours of Paris.”

Kurt laughed. “Definitely not, but I do want to go there too. I’m glad we came here.”

“Me too. I’ve enjoyed every minute of it.” He kissed Kurt. “You’re not getting … I’m not sure the right way to say it. Crowded? Is being with me all the time too much? I can work on finding ways to give you alone time. I know you’re an introvert and need time away from people to recharge.”

“Nope. Well, yes, I’m an introvert, but no I don’t need time away from you. That was actually something completely surprising that I learned about myself and about you. I can just be when you’re around. I’m not ‘performing Kurt’.” He used finger quotes. “When you’re around I’m just me, the same me that I am when you’re not around. I don’t need down time away from you, which was a quite shocking discovery on my part over a week ago, I guess. I figured that about three days into being together 24/7, I’d feel the need to recharge. But I never felt like I was ‘decharging’.”

“I think that’s probably the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me.” He kissed Kurt on the nose.

Kurt laughed. “Well, it’s true. I feel comfortable around you and for me that’s huge. It’s really hard to put into words because it’s just this feeling of ease and it’s amazing.” He pressed forward and kissed Sebastian. He ran his fingers through Sebastian’s hair causing him to moan. “This is how it’s supposed to be.”

They kissed until they fell asleep.

They arrived in London at 9:10. They left the airport and headed into downtown London. They stopped at their hotel and placed their backpacks in storage until they could check into their room. They bought tickets for a double-decker bus tour like they had when they first got to Paris. Given their limited time in London, they both decided it would be the best way to see the most frequented tourist attractions. They rode all the way around the red line. They saw the Marble Arch, Piccadilly Circus, Trafalgar Square, and Convent Garden. They got off at a stop and walked to see the Parliament building and Westminster Abbey. They got off at St. Paul’s Cathedral to look around. They rode across London Bridge, saw The Shard, rode across the Tower Bridge, and got off at the Tower of London to spend some time looking around. On the way back in they saw Victoria Palace and Victoria Station. They rode past Buckingham Palace, front and back. They rode around the
blue line that took them through the Kensington Park area.

At 6:00, they got off the bus where they had gotten on and officially checked into their room. They freshened up and went back out and got back on a regular bus to the area where the theater was. Marcus was waiting for them outside the theater.

He extended his hand to shake Kurt’s. “It’s good to see you, Kurt and to meet you, Sebastian.” He shook Sebastian’s hand as well.

“You too,” they both said.

“How’s your trip been so far?”

“We’re enjoying it a lot. We spent five days in the Loire Valley visiting castles, which was amazing.”

“I bet.”

“And we spent the last two days in Amsterdam and then arrived here early this morning and toured London all day.”

“You’ve been busy.”

Sebastian said, “We have. It’s been relaxing too though.”

“I’m excited to see Adam’s play.” Kurt rolled up onto his toes.

“You didn’t tell him we were coming did you?” Sebastian asked.

“No. You said it was a surprise, so he’ll definitely be surprised. And I told him that I had plans for the two of us all day tomorrow and not to make any plans.”

“Good,” Sebastian said. “Thanks for your help with this. We won’t keep you. We’ll see you later this evening, I imagine.”

“Yeah. After the shows.” He waved as he walked off.

“So, now what?” Kurt asked.

“Now, we go out to dinner. We’re going to a nice pub and have a traditional English dinner.”

“Why did we meet to get tickets from Marcus?”

“I was afraid that we’d get here today and the show would be sold out, so I had him get us tickets Wednesday. I Facebook stalked him. You said he was friends with Elliott, so I started there. He wasn’t hard to find.”

Kurt smiled. “Very ingenious. And sweet. Let’s go find this pub you want to eat at.”

Kurt and Sebastian stood in line near the stage door for the cast to come out. They had their playbills in hand and Kurt had a pen. When Adam came out, the two of them didn’t push to the front. They just gave him time to bask in the public accolades. Once the crowd began to disperse, they moved up close enough to be seen.
“Kurt! How? Sebastian! I’m so glad to see the two of you. What did you think?”

“It was great,” Kurt said. “You were magnificent.”

“I really liked it,” Sebastian said. “And Kurt’s right. You were great.”

Adam hugged each of them. They gave him their playbills to sign. “I can’t believe the two of you are here. I knew you were in Paris, but I didn’t think you’d jump the pond.”

“Of course we would. You’re our friend. I know you’d come see me in something if you were just a few hours away.”

“You’re right. You’re right. From the photos you’ve sent, you two seem to be enjoying yourselves and seeing a lot of beautiful places.

“It is fantastic. I’ve loved every minute of it.”

“How long are you two staying?”

Sebastian answered, “Until tomorrow evening.”

“I need to talk to Marcus about changing whatever he had planned for tomorrow.”

“We’re your plans for tomorrow,” Sebastian said. “Marcus’ plan was a ruse to keep you from making plans with anyone else so we could surprise you. He’s the one that got us tickets to make sure we could see the show tonight.”

“Well, then. Did he actually plan something?”

“Not that I’m aware of, but we didn’t get to talk to him long because he had to go to the theater to get ready for his show. He’s coming here when he’s done though.”

“I’ll see if any of the rest of these people are wanting to talk to me and I’ll meet you out front in a bit, yeah?”

“We’ll be waiting,” Kurt said.

Marcus showed up before Adam came out. He sat down on the bench next to Kurt and took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Kurt could sense his tension.

“Did the show go badly tonight?”

“Oh, no. It went fine. I’m just tired. We have two shows Thursday, one Friday, and two on Saturday. So, it’s just a lot.”

Adam came out. “I’m so glad you came. I’ve been working on a way to get it recorded.”

“We still want a video. Sam will want to see. Let’s get a picture in front of the poster for the show.”

Another cast member came out. Adam stopped her.

“Sheryl?”

She turned.
“Will you take our photo?”

“Yeah, sure.” She took Kurt’s camera and the four of them stood, two on each side of the poster and she snapped a couple of pictures.

“Thanks, dear.”

She nodded and headed off.

“I told Marcus, we’ve already had dinner and I’m sure you’re tired. We can head out and get some sleep so we’ll be rested and ready to go on whatever adventure you come up with for us.”

“Adventure, eh? Actually, I have the perfect idea. Tell me where you’re staying and we’ll come around tomorrow morning at 8:00 with a car.”

Sebastian showed him the name of the place on his phone.

“Got it. We’ll be there bright and early.” Adam hugged both of them. “I’m so glad you came. We’ll walk with you down to the bus.”

They stood around talking a bit until the bus arrived.

They got back to the hotel and went up to their room. Sebastian opened the door and let Kurt in. He locked the door behind them. Kurt hadn’t moved past the point of giving Sebastian enough room to close the door. Sebastian turned around and Kurt stepped towards him, pinning him against the door. He kissed him gently. “This room has a shower big enough for both of us. Care to join me?” He turned and swagged his way across the room undressing as he went.

“Surely, you don’t think I’d turn you down?”

“You might some time. You might just want a 5-minute shower because you’re tired and want to lie down. No one is always interested. I want you to know that you’re free to say ‘no’ if you don’t want to and I won’t be hurt. We’ll still snuggle, which I love too.”

“Well, today isn’t that day and I’d love to join you.”

Adam and Marcus picked them up right at 8:00. They tossed their backpacks in the trunk and managed to squeeze into the back.

“This is why people from Europe take trains,” Adam teased.

“I know. How long are Sebastian and I going to be sardines?”

“Just over an hour. Sorry, love.”

“We’ll live. I think. You may have to pull us out and straighten our legs for us. Where are we going?”

“Well, I thought about it last night and you’ve been going to see castles in France, so I thought I’d take you to Mountfitchet Castle. It’s not an original castle like the ones you’ve seen. It’s been reconstructed, as have the buildings. It’s like stepping back in time, back to 1066. I haven’t been there in ages, but it sounded like a fun way to enjoy part of the day. The world’s largest toy
collection is there too. It’s not far from where I grew up and my parents used to take me there. They have a fabulous tea room with all sorts of decadent treats.”

Kurt got Adam alone while they were walking around the village area. “Are you happy back here in England?”

“I am. I miss you though.”

“I miss you too. I feel better knowing that you’re happy. I know you wanted your play to do well, but I want to make sure that you’re doing well.”

Adam took his hand as they walked. “I am. I really am. I’m excited about the play, but as much as I like New York, I have missed being here. It would be so much easier if London and New York City were like a 2-hour drive from each other. There’s so much I love about both places.”

“I’m feeling that way about France. It feels like coming home in a way that makes no sense. But feelings don’t always make sense. So, Marcus?”

“Yes. He’s a really nice guy.”

“I’m glad for you. You deserve the best.”

They continued to talk as they walked around.

Sebastian walked around with Marcus for a while. “Don’t be concerned about Kurt trying to steal Adam. I saw the look on your face when Adam took his hand.”

“It’s hard. Adam was upfront about not being over Kurt when we met. He made a conscious choice to move on, but that’s not the same as not being in love with someone.”

“Our friend Sam is in the same situation. He’s been in love with a girl since about five years ago, I guess. They dated on and off, he dated other girls, and then they got back together when she was in New York and even lived together for a while, but she’s on a different path than him completely. He started seeing another girl maybe six weeks ago. He’s doing the same things – choosing to move on. Kurt loves Adam, but he’s never been in love with him.”

“I know. But I really like him. And Kurt’s a nice guy. I know he’s not going to interfere, even if he were around all the time. I just don’t want to be the first in a line of rebounds.”

“I get that. I waited until I knew that Kurt was over his ex before I asked him out. I wanted to be with him too much to risk getting involved before he was ready, but his situation is a lot different than Adam’s. Kurt never did anything to hurt Adam. He’s known all along that Kurt wanted them to be friends.”

“Yeah, but there was this lingering hope he had that once Kurt had finally gotten over his ex that he would be willing to give it a go with Adam.”

“I get that. I hope us coming doesn’t make things worse. I suspected that Adam was interested, and I actually thought Kurt might have been as well because of how close they are, but I never actually knew that Adam was in love with him all this time. Maybe bringing Kurt here was the wrong thing to do.”
“Maybe not. Maybe it will give Adam some closure, even if it stings. Maybe he’ll be able to let go completely.”

After they visited the whole village and watched the different events that were going on, they looked through the toy museum. Sebastian enjoyed it more than he thought he would because it was displayed chronologically, allowing the toys to be viewed through the passing of time.

After they finished looking at the toys, they headed into the tea room.

“Oh, my!” Kurt said.

“I told you.”

Marcus looked like he had won the lottery. “I think I’m skipping lunch and having three desserts.”

“Me too,” Sebastian agreed.

Kurt rolled his eyes and stepped forward to order a bowl of soup and a slice of cake. He stepped to the side and let the others order. Sebastian ordered a different soup, another type of cake, and two cookies, which he had packaged to take with them.

“There aren’t a lot of tourist attractions in Harlow, but it’s a nice place to grow up. I got the pleasure of meeting Kurt’s parents. I’d like to introduce the two of you to my family.”

“Sure,” Kurt said.

Adam pulled his phone out and stepped away from the other three. A few minutes later, he came back. “We’re all set.”

They four of them got back in the car and headed to Harlow.

“It’s not an old town. It was designed specifically to meet the need for housing after World War II. Sir Frederick Gibberd wanted everyday people to have access to art. He amassed one of the largest collections of statues – around 100. There’s quite a few in the center of town. That’s where we’re going to meet up with my parents.”

“How big is the town?”

“Well, I think about 75-80,000 people.”

“Oh, that’s pretty good sized.”

“It was a decent place to grow up. Sports were available like football and rugby and others. There’s a theater, which is where I spent quite a bit of time. It has everything a town needs to have.” Adam continued to talk about the area and his life growing up there as he drove.

After following the sculpture trail with Adam’s parents, it was evident that his mother was hoping they were all staying for dinner. Kurt took Adam aside when he got a chance.

“Is there a train from here to London?”
“Yes, why?”

“Why don’t you let the two of us take the train back and you stay and have dinner with your family? I can tell that your mother was disappointed when you said you had to get us back to London to catch our flight.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. We’ll be fine. Maybe you can just drop us off at the train station, and then go eat dinner with them.”

“If you’re sure. I’m glad you came.”

“Me too. I’ve enjoyed today. It was relaxing.” Kurt started to walk back to where everyone else was still looking at one of the sculptures. This time he pulled Sebastian to the side. “We’re going to take the train back to London.”

“Okay.”

Adam had told his mother while Kurt was talking to Sebastian.

Kurt said, “I’d like to get a picture of all of us with the Rodin sculpture.”

Mrs. Crawford asked someone to take their picture. Afterwards, she hugged Kurt and then Sebastian. “I’m so glad you two got to come and see Adam’s show and visit, even if it’s such a short one. I’m sorry that Sam didn’t get to come with you two since he’s in classes for the summer.”

“It was nice meeting both of you,” Kurt said. He shook hands with Mr. Crawford.

Sebastian shook hands with him as well.

“Likewise,” Mr. Crawford said.

Mrs. Crawford smiled and said, “It was nice getting to meet the people behind all of the fun photos that Adam sent. I have quite a few on my fridge.”

Kurt smiled too, remembering what Adam had said about her doing that. After their goodbyes, Adam drove them to the station. There were more handshakes and hugs, and a few tears as they said their goodbyes. It felt so much more final than it had when Adam left New York in June.

After spending four days of a combination of being tourists and going to museums and relaxing in Paris, Kurt and Sebastian were on their way to Guéledon for three days with Patrice and Leon.

“I can’t believe you got our names added to your group,” Kurt said. “This is going to be so amazing.”

“It really is amazing to see the progress using the 13th century building techniques. Watching the artisans work on everything is – it just makes me super happy. I love working on the tiles and the bricks. You two will mostly be helping with that as well, since you don’t have any masonry skills.”

“Leon worked on painting part of the interior the last time we came. He’s also work on baskets and making the paints. He can’t risk doing anything that would possibly injure his hands since he
does super fine motor tasks in doing the restorations.”

“That makes sense,” Sebastian said.

She and Leon talked about things they had done and the techniques being used and the history behind the project on the drive there. Once they got there, they were completely amazed.

“This is going to be spectacular,” Kurt said. “Even if I do have to dress like a 13th century French peasant.”

As unskilled laborers, they spent time doing a variety of things including the tiles and bricks like Patrice had mentioned. At the end of the day, they headed back to their hotel. They went their separate ways. Kurt and Sebastian showered and then used the laundry facilities at the hotel before they went out to dinner.

They met back up the next morning and spent the day doing the same things they had done the day before except that Patrice managed to get permission for them to help lay one block of the actual castle Saturday evening right before it was time to leave for the day. She used Kurt’s camera and took pictures of them.

Sunday, Leon worked on painting one of the interior rooms while the other three helped lay bricks in one area for part of the day before they went back to making bricks and painting tiles. After they finished their shift, Kurt took photos of the things that they had worked on while they were there. Before they left, Kurt bought a DVD of the project in the gift shop. He also picked up a tiny bottle of the dirt they had used to make the clay for the bricks and a keychain.

They drove to Kurt and Sebastian’s next destination. The four of them showered and changed before Patrice and Leon headed back to Paris. Patrice took the period clothes back with them.

“Thank you for including us in this,” Kurt said, as Patrice and Leon were getting back into the car.

“You’re welcome. I’m glad you both came. We’ll see you when you get back.”

Kurt and Sebastian waved as they drove off. They ate dinner before they went back to their room.

Kurt started stripping as soon as the hotel room door was shut. “I need another shower – a much longer one. I’m sore.” He laid the clothes he had on out to wear the next morning and went into the bathroom and turned the shower back on and got in.

A few minutes later, Sebastian peeked in. “Can I join you?”

“Definitely.”

Sebastian got in with him.

“I had a fabulous time. I would definitely go back.”

“Me too. Can I wash your hair? I missed doing it the last few nights since all we had was a tiny single shower in the last place.”

“Sure. I like the way it feels when you do it. I’ll do yours next. I have lotion too. We can give each other massages and it will double as a hand moisturizing activity as well.”
Sebastian laughed. “Sounds perfect.”
Chapter 32

Sebastian woke up first, pushed up on his elbow, and started peppering Kurt’s chest with kisses.

“Mmm. A kiss alarm clock. I like it.”

“Good morning, beautiful.”

“It is with you all snuggled up on my chest.” Kurt kissed the top of his head. “I don’t even know where we are, but I slept really well. I think you’re the cure to me having a hard time sleeping. Having Sam in the bed helps, but you’re a much better snuggle partner for sleeping, but you can’t tell Sam. It will hurt his feelings,” Kurt teased.

“I will keep it to myself, and I will gloat privately.”

Kurt laughed. “So, what is the plan for today?”

“We’re doing it already.”

“We’re lying in bed all day?”

“We’re relaxing. We’re going to what I brought us here for tomorrow. I thought we needed a nice relaxing day. I was hoping for some kissing and more snuggling.”

“Do we get some type of breakfast here or do we need to go out and get it?”

“They listed breakfast as included, but I’m not sure what.” He picked up the phone and called the front desk and asked what they had. After he hung up, he said, “Fruit, Nutella, bread, coffee, hot chocolate.”

“Works for me.”

“I’ll go get some and bring it back for us.” He kissed Kurt on the cheek. He hopped up, put some clothes on quickly, and left.

While he was gone, Kurt used the bathroom, shaved, and brushed his teeth. He opened the door when Sebastian tapped it with his foot. He shut it after Sebastian walked through. Sebastian sat everything down on the tiny table and went into the bathroom himself. He came out in just his underwear, but he had shaved and brushed his teeth. He put the clothes back on the rack with Kurt’s. They sat on the end of the bed and ate.

“We’ll go out for lunch and get something more substantial.”

Kurt scooted back up in the bed and lay on his side and patted the bed. Sebastian pulled the drapes back, leaving the sheers covering the window for privacy, but letting the light in. He turned off the lights and got in bed with Kurt.

“I had a great time a Guédelon. I’ll add castle builder to my résumé.”

“Don’t forget tile maker, brick maker, and brick layer.”

“Right. Definitely can’t forget those. It was amazing though. This whole trip has been amazing. We’ve been together for a month as of yesterday. And we’ve been here a little over three weeks.”
Sebastian reached out and put his hand on the side of Kurt’s face. Kurt closed his eyes and Sebastian gently ran his thumb over Kurt’s eyelid and leaned forward and kissed him gently.

“I’ve never seen you so calm. You look peaceful.”

“I’m not sure that I’ve ever been this calm. I’ve always been pretty tightly wound. I think part of it is your lack of expectations. And I mean that in a good way. You’re not expecting me to do for you what you can do for yourself. That was one thing my counselor reminded me of when I talked about us dating.”

“What do you mean?”

“Oh, that you’re already fully capable of taking care of yourself and you don’t need micromanaged or watched over. It’s an absolutely different experience for me. I’ve been micromanaging things since before I was old enough to be doing it. Do we have the food we need for the week? Did the laundry get done? Are the dishes done? Just everything. My dad didn’t do any of that. My dad still can’t cook anything. He had the shop to run, so I took on the household duties. I became self-reliant. I am reliable and that’s important to me. Let me see if I can think of a truly ridiculous example.” He paused and thought. “One day at the loft, Rachel was resting her voice. Her phone started to ring. She wrote on a piece of paper ‘Take a message’ and wanted me to answer her phone for her.”

“That’s definitely ridiculous. Why didn’t she just let it go to voicemail, listen to it, and then send the person a text in response?”

“Exactly my point. But the real issue was that it was never reciprocal. With you, everything is different. I do things. You do things. We do things. Everything gets done. No fuss, no arguing. I don’t have to ask you if you have your keys or your wallet or anything. You’re self-reliant. If you forget something, you would never say ‘Why didn’t you remind me to pick it up on the way out?’ You’d blame yourself for forgetting. It’s a calm I’ve not experienced in my working memory. Another example – Mr. Schue waited until the week before a competition to pick the pieces. The first year we went to Nationals, we wrote those songs AFTER we got to New York. We learned the choreography in New York the day before we performed.”

“That’s insane.”

“Exactly my point. I’m not sure I’ve ever been calm like I am with you. I was on edge every day at McKinley. I was on edge every day at Dalton. I didn’t follow the status quo at NYADA. Students were aggravated about the way I was admitted and there was tension from the get-go. Blaine joined me the second semester I was there. Being randomly surveilled doesn’t lead to a feeling of calm. Calm just didn’t exist in my world until I moved in with you. It’s an extraordinary feeling to just be able to let go and be. It took time for us to get where we are, but it happened because you were consistent. I slowly shared things about myself and opened up to you. Each time I trusted you a little more because you hadn’t broken the previous trust I had extended to you. And now I have something I’ve never had before—a feeling of safety and trust and acceptance. It’s liberating. I know it probably sounds absurd to make such a big deal out of it.”

“Actually, it doesn’t. Hearing you explain it—now it makes perfect sense. I can’t promise to never mess up, but I will never intentionally do anything to cause you harm or break your trust.”

“I know.” Kurt broke the stillness and pushed forward to kiss Sebastian. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”
Kurt shifted a bit and Sebastian snuggled up and put his head back on Kurt’s chest. Kurt ran his fingers through Sebastian’s hair, causing him to nearly purr. “I think part of it is that you were broken too. You don’t have a problem admitting that you needed help. You got help and you healed. And Sam too. I know that people aren’t perfect. I know that people do things that hurt other people. People do things that hurt themselves. The key is what happens after that. I’m trusting you to own up to your mistakes and I know you’re trusting me to do the same.”

“All of this is amazing to me too. I’d been so alone for so long. And you blew into my life and turned it upside down. And it’s so much better this way. You’re right that I had healed in many ways, but I hadn’t allowed myself to be a part of my own life again. I had cut myself off from everyone and I was waiting for my life to start again after I fulfilled the obligations my father had for me. When you moved in, I originally just thought you and Sam would keep to yourselves and that it would be an uneasy truce where we would ignore each other’s existence for 6 months until you got on your feet and I would be doing something nice for Isabelle and atoning for my behavior in high school. Don’t get the idea that I didn’t willingly agree because I did. I wanted to do something nice. I just didn’t expect you to actually forgive me and then befriend me. And honestly, I didn’t know you at all. I thought I did, but I didn’t. And as you said, you shared more and more of yourself with me and I did the same with you and we became real friends and I fell for you. The more of yourself you revealed, the more I liked you. And once the semester ended and we really got to spend time together, I was a goner.” He tipped his head back and turned Kurt’s face so that he could kiss him. “And it’s been an amazing 8 months. It started a lot like this with you holding me. When I came back after the funeral, I felt so lost and torn. And you were so kind and gentle and you just held me and let me cry.” He pressed up in the bed just enough to close the remaining gap and kissed Kurt. He laid his head back down on Kurt’s shoulder. “This is where I belong – in your arms. You said you feel safe in my arms. The same is true for me.”

Kurt turned on his side a little and slid down. He looked Sebastian in the eyes, really looking into them. He placed a feather light kiss on Sebastian’s lips starting their little back and forth kissing game. It didn’t take long for Sebastian to be the one to kiss Kurt. He pushed up onto his elbow and hooked his leg over Kurt and ran his free hand along Kurt’s arm, down past his elbow and onto his waist, and then around to his backside. He pulled Kurt closer so they were practically flush against each other. They lay that way for quite some time just kissing and holding each other close.

“So, we’re staying here until Wednesday?” Kurt asked as he took a bite of the soup he’d ordered for lunch.

“Yeah. Two days at Château de Fontainebleau. There’s just so much to see and I’ve wanted to go for so long I want to see as much as I can. Is that okay?”

“It’s fine. I want to go.” He reached for Sebastian’s hand and put his over the top. “It’s not a lack of interest. I’m just thinking. I want to see everything we can too. You’ve told me so many things about it. I’m really excited to see it in person.”

Sebastian lifted his hand and interlaced their fingers. “I just want to make sure that you’re enjoying yourself too. I don’t want you to feel like you’re being dragged along on my bucket list, even though you sort of are.”

Kurt laughed. “I love your bucket list so far. What else is on it?”

Sebastian winked at him.

“Oh, really?”
Sebastian cracked up laughing. “Let’s see. I kissed the man I love at the top of the Eiffel Tower. I took the man I love to my favorite garden for a picnic breakfast. I’ve seen several the castles on my list and I’m adding another one tomorrow. And even better than my bucket list version, I’m seeing them with the man I love. Hmm… my list is completely G rated. We’ve done quite a few of them together. Going to the ocean. Going to the mountains. Some of the places we went to see in New York. There are some that will probably never happen.”

“Like what?”

“I’d like to go to Japan and Australia. I’d like to get a book published. I haven’t actually looked through my list in a while.”

“Me neither actually. I had mostly given up on it, but now I think I’ll look through it when we go back and I’ll update it.”

“I’ll go through mine and we can compare. I’ll do yours with you too. Are there any places here that we haven’t gone to that you want to see?”

“I think we’ve hit all of things I had ever seriously thought about getting to visit. I hadn’t really looked outside of Paris because it was just a dream, beyond dream – a fantasy maybe. I never spent a lot of time researching something that I didn’t really think would happen or at least not happen until I was a lot older. Whatever else you want to see or do is fine with me. I’ve enjoyed every place we’ve gone. As sappy as it sounds, I’m enjoying just being with you whatever we do.”

“Well, that makes me sappy too then.”

“I’d like to get a cookbook while we’re here. I’ve had a lot of different soups that I’ve really liked. And it’s not so much that what’s in them is that different, but the seasonings make all the difference. And I’d like to learn to make French bread.”

“Okay. There’s probably a bookshop nearby. We’ll ask the waitress. Do you want anything else?”

“No thanks. Maybe when we’re out walking around we’ll see something to try.”

“Sure.” He asked for directions to a bookshop and paid their bill when the waitress came back.

“Which one do you want to get?” Kurt asked.

“Let’s just get both. The photos look really good in both. We won’t know which recipes we like the best until we try them. We can put one in each of our bags and they won’t add that much weight. They’re not that thick or heavy.”

“Okay. I know we had weight limits on our bags.”

Sebastian took the books, grabbed Kurt’s hand, and got in line to pay for them. Once they were outside, they started to talk again. They walked and talked all around the area. They eventually walked past a bakery.

“Ready for dessert now?” Sebastian asked.

Kurt smiled and walked towards the door. He held it open and let Sebastian walk through without letting go of Sebastian’s hand. They chose a delicious looking cherry pastry and took it outside to eat it. They alternated taking bites.
“Are we still going to be like this when we get back to New York?” Kurt asked.

“Like what?”

“You feeding me half of a dessert sitting out in public with your other arm around my shoulders?”

“Well, that had been my plan. Is it bothering you? Should I stop?”

“No, the exact opposite actually. It makes me feel really loved and totally normal, which is completely different from the way I’ve felt for a long time. Probably since – well, a really long time ago.”

“Well, unless you say otherwise, this is our new normal.” He kissed him chastely.

Kurt’s eyes lit up and he scooted even closer to Sebastian, not that there had been much room between them before. “I love our new normal.”

“Do you want to walk around town some more or go back to the hotel?”

“Mmm. How about a little of each? Maybe we can take a different way back and see more of the town on the way back.”

“Sure.”

Kurt stood up and waited for Sebastian to go inside and toss out their trash. As soon as he was close enough again, Kurt wrapped his arm around Sebastian’s waist. Sebastian reached over and back and wrapped his arm around Kurt’s waist. He leaned into him and kissed him on the neck, causing Kurt to laugh and smile.

“I love to see you happy.”

“Well, being with you is fun.”

“I can’t believe we’re going to try this in this regular size tub. We need a bigger tub.”

“Where’s your sense of adventure, Bas? I’ll get in first and then you can sit between my legs and we can soak.”

“How about we just snuggle naked and the next hotel I book, I’ll get one with a tub big enough for the both of us to fit in comfortably?”

“Okay.” Kurt started undressing Sebastian.

“Okay?”

“Yeah. That’s fine. I can take ‘no’ for an answer. And I like your idea. There’s no reason to fuss. I just want to be close to you. How about a massage?” He had managed to get Sebastian down to his underwear already.

“Sure.”

“What would you think of getting some massage oil?”

“I don’t have any reason to be opposed to it. I don’t know why it would be better than the lotion.”
He reached for Kurt’s belt and started to undress him when he realized that Kurt wasn’t undressing himself.

“I’ll show you after we get some.”

“I’ll look forward to that.” He unbuttoned Kurt’s shirt.

Kurt winked at him. “You should.”

“Have you tried it before?”

“Nope.” Kurt sat down and let Sebastian pull his pants off.

Sebastian laid Kurt’s clothes out neatly on top of his own. “Intriguing.” He climbed around Kurt and lay down in the bed and extended his arm so Kurt could lay his head on his chest and snuggle.

Kurt snuggled in close.

“I need a hint.”

“Nope, no hints. You’ve surprised me a lot. This time it will be my turn to surprise you.”

“Okay.”

As they stepped inside the castle gates the next morning, Sebastian stopped and took in the complete view. Once he had taken it all in, he took off speed walking toward the horseshoe staircase. They got tickets for two of the guided tours, which took about three hours in total. They left for lunch and went back in the afternoon to look around on their own.

They had taken the tour of the Napoleonic apartments, but they went back to look more carefully.

“All of the styles from Baroque to Roccoco and even the less ornamented areas look overwhelming to the modern eye. I can only imagine what someone would say if a designer suggested that every piece of furniture in a room have that bright green and blue print on it. They’d get fired so fast. But I can only imagine if one of the decorators from one of these periods walked into one of the minimalist modern flats. They would look around and wonder if we somehow lost the ability to do anything creative. Squared everything with no curves and no color. It would make a very funny crossover time travel episode of something.”

Sebastian laughed. “You’re right. I can see one of the Italian Renaissance artists entering one of those minimalist apartments and asking if it was someone’s cell and wondering what crime they had committed to be forced to live in a place devoid of character and color.”

“You could write a story. I’d read it, but it would need to be a picture book. It could double as an intro to art styles throughout history. You’d need an illustrator though. I’m not sure if Sam can draw that type of stuff or not. He’s always been pretty private about his artwork, but it might be something he’d try to do.”

“He’s so good. Why would he be afraid to show people?”

“I’m not sure that he was afraid exactly. I think it was just something he did for himself. I was really surprised when he brought home the first paintings and gave them to you. I’ve seen his stuff, but not many people have. I’m not sure who else even knew that he took art classes.”
“I didn’t know that other people didn’t know. You knew, so I didn’t think about it. He seemed really open about excited about it.”

“I’m pretty sure that everyone besides me just saw him as a pretty boy with an empty head – the male version of a dumb blonde. And he just went with it.”

“Well, I really like all of the paintings he did for the apartment.”

“Me too.” Kurt stepped closer to one of the paintings. “There’s so much stuff in these room, I think you could spend several days in one room if you took the time to look at everything carefully.”

“I’m sure you could. Just one of the tapestries in here could take hours to look at carefully.”

“Napoleon’s camping gear was interesting to look at.”

They stopped in front of a painting of Napoleon, Marie Louise, and their children.

Sebastian said, “He wrote Joséphine love letters. When he announced that he was divorcing her, it’s said that she fell to the ground wailing. But in their 13 years together, she hadn’t been able to give him an heir, so he divorced her and he remarried. Sometimes I try imagining what it would have been like to live back then at the turn of the 1800’s. You and I might have been able to pull off being secret lovers, but our families would have absolutely expected us to marry and continue our family lines by providing male heirs.”

“Or maybe we would have both just been peasants and we could have run off to live on our own somewhere without having to worry about all of that.” Kurt squeezed his hand.

“I like that scenario better, although I hope you’re better at farming than I am or we’d starve.”

Kurt hip checked him. “We’d learn to farm. We’d get a cow too, so we could make yogurt and cheese.”

“Grow grapes and make wine?”

“Sure. Are you ready to head out for today? Or is there something else you want to look at before we go?”

“I’m ready. There are other things to do and see today.” His eyes twinkled with a hint of mischievousness.

“Oh, wow. How will I pick? I have no idea what some of these would taste like, but they sound so interesting. Rose? Poppy? Lavender? They all must be good or they’d quit selling them, right? I’m going to try something really unusual. I like the name 1001 Glaces. It reminds me of Scheherazade. A new flavor of ice cream every day to keep people from leaving the area?”

Sebastian winked. “It might work if the ice cream is good enough.”

They got in line and ordered.

They ate as they walked through town. They stopped in a couple of churches for a few minutes each just to take a quick look. Sebastian had another goal in mind.

“Where are we going?” Kurt took Sebastian’s hand.
“To a museum.”

“What kind?”

“You’ll see.” He winked at Kurt.

When they got close enough for Kurt to see the sign, he said, “A sugar museum?”

“Ah, not any sugar. A special barley sugar that nuns used to make a candy that only they had the recipe for, invented here not quite 400 years ago. France’s first known candy. The nuns kept the recipe secret for hundreds of years.”

“I see. Sounds intriguing. Secret candy recipes. I wonder if Roald Dahl read about it or something similar to get his idea.”

“I’m not sure.”

They went in and bought tickets for the tour so they’d learn about the history. When they finished looking around, they went to the gift shop and bought some candy.

Kurt picked up a box and said, “The chocolates are for now and tomorrow, or until we eat them all. And let’s get those poppy lollipops made with the barley sugar.” He pointed to some packages on a nearby shelf. “Those would be something we could take back with us without them melting that would be something no one has ever tried.”

“Sounds good to me.”

They paid for their candy and left.

“Any more surprises for today?”

“At least one.”

Kurt took his hand and said, “Lead the way, mon homme douceâtre.”

Sebastian turned and kissed him. “Mmm hmm. Perfectly sweet.”

They turned the corner.

“This way, cupcake.”

“We talked about this,” Kurt said, trying not to laugh.

“Yes, we did, sweetcakes.”

“Bas!”

Sebastian pulled Kurt to the edge of the sidewalk and then down a narrow alleyway, just a few feet.

“Why are we in an alley?”

Sebastian turned him, stepped closer, and then he gently put his hands on the sides of Kurt’s face and kissed him soundly.

When they paused for air, Kurt said, “Nice alley.” He wrapped his arms around Sebastian’s neck.

Sebastian pressed his forehead to Kurt’s. “Ready to go to the next place?”

“Come on. We’ll tease and play later.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” Kurt continued to tease. He took Sebastian’s hand and went back out to the sidewalk. “Lead the way.”

They continued to walk through town. Sebastian turned a few times and they stopped.

“A cheese shop?”

“A cheese shop. According to what I read they make special cheese using the barley sugar. I thought it would be fun to try some.”

“It does sound unusual. Maybe we can try some and then buy some other cheeses for dinner. We can stop and get some bread and fruit somewhere. We can have a picnic at that park we saw by the river.”

After they had eaten, they went back to the hotel. Kurt pulled out the two cookbooks they had bought the day before and put them on the bed. He took his pants and shoes off and pushed the pillows up to lean against them. He patted the spot next to him. Sebastian followed his lead and partially undressed and sat down next to Kurt. He scooted in close to Kurt.

“That’s the one thing I’ve missed being here.”

“What’s that?”

“We haven’t been reading and talking about the books we read. I’ve just realized how much that had become a part of what we did together. It’s one of the ways we really got to know each other so well. I miss our book talks.”

“I do too.” He wrapped his left arm behind Kurt’s shoulders and held the book with right hand.

They looked through both cookbooks. When they finished Kurt put them back on the small table and sat back down next to Sebastian. He leaned in and put his head on Sebastian’s shoulder.

“Something’s bothering you.”

“We’ve been so busy doing these amazing things and seeing beautiful places that I had managed to push the fact that Sam won’t be coming home on the weekends out of my mind for a while. But for some reason it popped back to the forefront. Probably because of the picnic dinner in the park reminded me of us having picnics in Central Park.”

“I’m glad for him in a way because I know he’ll need the time to study rather than drive back and forth and work, but I’m going to miss him too. I’m losing my second best friend. Hopefully, he’ll still come visit us once a month or something. It’s not that far away. We could take the train out there if we need to.”

“In one way it helps me financially, but it complicates our Sunday shopping.”

“How does it help?”
“Because I was paying half of his car insurance since we were using his truck while he was at work. And we used it to go on the spring break trip and to drive to Pennsylvania that time. So, with no access to his truck, he can remove our names from the policy and his cost will go down some, and then it should go down even more because he’s not living in the City.”

“But we won’t have it to use to go do our weekly shopping trips. I guess our backpacks will get a new use when we get home. With the wheels on them, we’ll be able to pull them to the subway and then when we get back off.”

“We’ll try it and see if it works. Hopefully it will. I like being able to get everything at once and prep it all together on Sundays while we speak French all day. And read books and talk. We have to have ‘the talk’ too.”

Sebastian laughed. “I’m pretty sure that while I’ve not yet…”

Kurt interrupted him laughing even harder. “‘The talk’ meaning the money talk.”

“Oh. We can talk about that and the other topic as well if you want. I’ll be working as Cassie’s TA and you’ll be working as Isabelle’s PA and we’ll pay the bills and buy food.”

“But this time we’re going to split the utilities and food costs evenly since it will just be the two of us.”

“That’s what I figured. Did you think I thought something else?”

“No, I just wanted to make sure that you knew that I didn’t expect Grandma Smythe to foot the bills for the utilities just because she bought the apartment from your father. Do we have to pay the property taxes? Because if we do, I’ll need to email Sam today to get him to try to persuade his boss to hire me to replace him since he said he was going to give his notice this past weekend. Maybe his boss hasn’t had a chance to hire anyone new yet. And you’ll have to get another job as well that will fit around your classes.”

“I don’t think so, but she didn’t specifically say. I’m going to email her and ask. We need to know ASAP.” Sebastian got up and grabbed his phone to email her. He put his phone back down and rejoined Kurt in bed once he finished. “Do you want to talk about the other topic?”

“I’ll just say that I don’t feel the same way I did about it that I did a month ago.”

“In what way?”

Kurt rearranged and sat straddling Sebastian’s lap. He ran his hands through Sebastian’s hair for a few minutes. He reached back behind Sebastian and lifted the pillows and wrapped his legs around Sebastian instead of straddling him and then let the pillows back down. “In the way that I have enjoyed every second of ‘working up to it’ as you called it.” He kissed down Sebastian’s neck as he started to unbutton his shirt. “Very enjoyable.” He slipped Sebastian’s shirt off his shoulders and laid it on the bed next to them. He kissed back up the other side of Sebastian’s neck.

Sebastian turned and met Kurt’s lips and regained enough presence of mind to start unbuttoning Kurt’s shirt. He paused the kiss long enough to respond, “So have I.”

“And rather than it being something I’m dreading and feel obligated to do, I’m feeling very much like it is actually something to look forward to.”

Sebastian ran his hands from Kurt’s shoulders down to his hands and pulled Kurt’s hands to his lips and kissed Kurt’s knuckles. “I’m glad you feel that way because it’s definitely something I’m
looking forward to, but I wouldn’t ever push you if you still felt the way you did previously.”

“Just being like this – being comfortable in my own skin, feeling good when you touch me, wanting you to touch me – it’s completely changed how I feel about all of it.” He leaned forward and kissed Sebastian. “I want everything with you. With you, I can just relax and let go and feel safe and enjoy everything.”

Sebastian had been smiling the whole time Kurt was talking. When Kurt finished, Sebastian leaned forward and kissed him. “That’s how I feel too. What would you say to trying something new?”

“Like what?”

“Like I show you how good my mouth can feel other places?” He gently pushed Kurt back and then lowered him to his back. He kissed along his neck and collarbone.

“Are you sure you want to? I don’t want you to feel like you have to just because we’re talking about this topic.”

“I don’t feel like I have to, but a certainly feel like I WANT to. But if you don’t want me to, I’ll wait until you do.”

“Yes. Yes, I want you to.”

Sebastian kissed down his neck and lower and lower until he reached his goal.

“That was indescribable.” Kurt curled up in Sebastian’s arms. “When I catch my breath, can I try? I make no promises about being any good at it, but I will do my best.”

“Yes, definitely yes.”

This time Sebastian was lying in Kurt’s arms snuggling. “That felt amazing.”

“I’ll work on getting better at it.”

“Only if you enjoyed it. And there was absolutely nothing wrong with what you did. I enjoyed every bit of it.”

“I definitely enjoyed it and I’ll enjoy improving my skills whenever I have the opportunity to do so.” He kissed the top of Sebastian’s head and ran his hand down Sebastian’s arm. “I love you.”

“I love you too. Do you want to go shower?”

“Yeah. You’re coming too, right?”

“Of course. When we get home, will you move your stuff so we share the bathroom in our room?”

“Yes. You mentioned wanting to move the desks into the other room.”

“I do want to. I want our room to be for us to be together and relax and talk and stuff. I never did really get into the hang of using the desk in my bedroom. I only did when you were home and needed the kitchen table when you were trying to get all that stuff from you internship organized. When you were in class, I still studied at the dining table. You can move your keyboard into our
bedroom. I like listening to you play and sing.”

“Will you sing with me more? We sound good together.”

“If you want me to.”

“I just said I did.” He kissed Sebastian on the top of the head. “I just thought of something. You need to change your emergency contact to someone besides your Father. He hates me and if something happened to you, he could keep me from seeing you.”

“I’ll change it to Isabelle if it has to be a blood relative and to you, if I can list anyone.”

“We should fix our phones so that we have each other as our emergency contacts.”

“We’ll do that after we shower, even though I’m comfy and don’t really want to move.”

“We’ll feel better. Come on.”

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The next morning they went down to the small breakfast area and ate before they checked out. They left their backpacks in the security area to pick up before they left town. They headed back to Château de Fontainebleau for their second day of tours and exploration. They enjoyed themselves as much they had the day before. When they left, they picked their bags up and headed for the train station.

They took the train into Paris, but instead of getting off and heading back to Celeste’s, Sebastian led Kurt to a different train and they boarded and set off for one last excursion to Mont Saint Michel. They exited the train in Rennes and took a bus the rest of the way. They didn’t arrive until nearly 8:00. They signed in at the bed and breakfast that Sebastian had booked and took their bags up to their room.

“I’m sorry that it doesn’t have a garden tub. I had booked this room already and I did look online, but I couldn’t find anything in a price range I found acceptable.”

“It’s fine. It’s beautiful. It has so much personality compared to a lot of the places we’ve stayed. You’ve done an amazing job planning everything.” He wrapped his arms around Sebastian and hugged him. “I know that most of the places were chosen because of their proximity to the trains and the sights we wanted to see and you were trying not to get expensive places when all we were going to do was sleep in the room. But this room is really pretty. A lot of the stuff in here is antique.”

“This place has really good reviews and the breakfast looked fantastic. Eggs, ham, bread, cheese, fruit, French custard pie, which is like cheesecake, coffee, hot chocolate, and juice.”

“Sounds delicious.”

“The room has a view of the garden. Let’s look.”

Kurt let go of him and they walked over to the window and pulled the curtains back and looked out. “Oh, it’s really pretty. I know it’s pretty early, but how about we shower and rest? We’ll wake up early and go sit out in the garden before we eat breakfast.”

“Perfect.”
“What they lack in a tub, they 100% make up for with that fabulous walk-in shower and the fluffy robes,” Kurt said.

“The shower was amazing.” Sebastian stepped forward a couple of steps, pinning Kurt to the wall. “In more ways than one.” He kissed down Kurt’s neck and pulled the robe off his shoulder to continue his trail of kisses.

“If you keep that up, we’ll need another shower.”

“That would be just dreadful,” he licked and kissed Kurt’s shoulder. “What a terrible way to spend the evening. In a fabulous shower with my gorgeous naked boyfriend.”

“I see how it is.” Kurt laughed. He untied Sebastian’s robe and let his hands wander. He distracted him enough to manage to push Sebastian away from where he was pinned and direct him toward the bed. When they got closer, Kurt swept him up off his feet and took the few steps to the bed and plopped Sebastian down on the bed and then quickly pinned him. “May I?”

“Please.”

An hour later, they were curled up chest to chest gently kissing. The lights were out and they were in bed to stay.

Sebastian took a deep breath and let it slowly.

“Is something bothering you?”

“Not bothering me. I just can’t quite figure out how to say is so what I mean comes across the right a way.”

“Go ahead. I won’t jump to conclusions and I’ll let you explain yourself.” Kurt kissed him gently.

“I don’t want you think that I expect things to stay the way they have been when we go to bed at night.”

Kurt waited.

“I absolutely want to be with you in those ways, but I don’t want you to think that I’m going to expect it of you because we’ve been doing those things here frequently. I know when we get back we’re both going to have adjust to our new schedules and our work loads and once you start rehearsals, you’ll be gone more and I’m taking my senior seminar, which while require a lot of writing that I plan on doing while you’re at rehearsals. So, I know there will be times when all we have the energy to do is to fall into bed and sleep. And I know there will be days when I really want to, but you’re too tired. And there may be days when you want to and I’m still writing because I hit a wall that afternoon and had to take a walk or something to clear my mind.”

Kurt ran his hand through Sebastian’s hair. “Thank you.”

“For sharing with an alarming lack of clarity what I’m trying to get across?”

Kurt kissed him gently. “You explained it perfectly clearly in feeling, if not in words. And I really appreciate how you feel about it. And that you won’t take ‘no’ as a lack of interest on my part or as
a sign to badger me until I say ‘yes’.”

“I wouldn’t do that.”

“I know. That’s why I thanked you. You’re not going to take a lack of physical release on a daily basis as a rejection or as a sign that I’m not interested or that I’m rejecting you or your love.”

“Right.”

“There’s one thing I probably should have brought up before now. I’m sorry that I didn’t think about it. I’m not sure how much of a role pornography has had in your life over the last four years, but it’s not something I deal with well.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that I don’t enjoy looking at it or watching it. And I don’t know what level of importance it had in your life or maybe still has. But you don’t have to answer – I’m not expecting you to tell me. I do have something to ask you.”

“What?”

“Will you come to me first, please?”

“Like to ask your permission?”

“No, as in will you give me a chance to provide what you need? Even if I’m busy and in the middle of three projects, I would gladly stop and give you what you need rather than you have turn to porn.”

“Okay.”

“I know I’m not built like a porn star in any way, but I will gladly lie out on the bed at home unclothed while reading school assignments if it will keep you from turning to porn or someone else to …”

“Stop right there, please. I’m not big into porn. I never was. I can stop completely. I don’t need it. I haven’t looked at any since we got together. I honestly don’t remember when the last time was. Seeing some of it can be stimulating, but not like being with someone I love who loves me back. Lying with you just talking is better than watching or looking at porn. But if I get the urge to look at it, I will ask you to be with me instead.”

“Thank you. I want you to know that means a lot to me.”

“There’s something more to this, but I’m not going to pry. I can absolutely respect your request without needing a reason other than it being important to you.”

Kurt wiggled a little and got Sebastian to half lie on him rather than just snuggle against him. In the new position it was easier to kiss him, which is what he did. He ran his hand down Sebastian’s cheek. “I really like kissing you.”

Sebastian smiled and kissed Kurt again. “Good because I really like you kissing me too.”

Kurt laughed. “You make me laugh.”

“So, my kisses are funny?”
Kurt laughed even more. “Oh, no. Definitely not. Your kisses are relaxing and hot both, but
definitely not a laughing matter. Well, I take that back. When you kiss tickle me, they’re definitely
a laughing matter then.”

“Mmm. I really like kiss tickling you, but I’m too tired right now. We’ll save that for another day.”

“I never thought I’d like being tickled, but I like it when you do it. But for now, let’s just snuggle.
I’m tired too.”

“Oh, I checked my email while you were doing your moisturizing. Grandma diverted the interest
from one of her investment accounts to a joint account with my name on it as well, and I’m
supposed to set up autopay for the utilities and the property taxes and the coop fees.”

“I thought we were going to pay for the utilities.”

“So, did I, but I’m not going to try to argue with her via email. We can call her when we get back.
The important part is that we don’t both need to get second jobs to pay the other things.”

“That’s true. That’s really good news. I really do need to focus. If I had needed to work a second
job, I would have been even more busy than last semester because I have to audition for the fall
play and be in it.”

“Do you know what it is yet?”

“No, but I haven’t checked anything related to school while we’ve been gone. I should do that
soon. I’ve been enjoying my time here as Kurt. I know I did that one thing for Isabelle, but that was
just a few days. The rest of the time I’ve gotten to spend time as just myself. Not NYADA Kurt or
Vogue Kurt or camp counselor Kurt or singing waiter Kurt or any of the other incarnations of Kurt
that have existed. Here I’ve just gotten to be me. It’s been relaxing. I’ve already told you that I’m
struggling with the idea of going back.”

Sebastian didn’t interrupt and gave Kurt time to process his thoughts and feelings without making
him feel rushed.

“Now that I finally exist in a state of wholeness, it’s hard to figure out where NYADA fits into my
life.” He paused again, still thinking. “When I went back in my room that day and opened the other
gift that Adam had left for me, I never told anyone what it was. I showed to you and Sam, but I
didn’t hold it close enough to you that you could tell what it was and I haven’t worn it yet. It’s a
brooch – a phoenix rising from the flames and soaring. The note said, ‘Your life may have been a
smoldering fire that burst into flames, but you’re rising from the ashes and your feathers are
growing back even more lovely than ever. Before long, you’ll soar high above, more beautiful and
free than you had ever imagined. Stay strong.’”

“And that really does match with what I said about you looking more peaceful and calm that I have
ever seen you.”

“And you’ve been more upbeat and cheerful than I’ve ever seen you. When we get back, we’ll just
have to prioritize ourselves. Yes, schoolwork is important, work is important, but we’re important
too, both as individuals and as a couple. I will struggle with prioritizing myself. I’m sure you
already know that about me. I’m going to do my best to not fall back into that pattern.”

“We’ll work at it, but it will be worth it. If I’m ever sullen, and you feel like I’m pulling away, just
feel free to invade my personal space and touch me. Snuggle up to me while I read or sit close to
me. I love it when you run your fingers through my hair. I’m not expecting it to be easy, but I think
we can do it.” He kissed Kurt. “Let’s get some sleep. I’m looking forward to a delicious breakfast with my gorgeous boyfriend, who just happens to be the best snuggler ever.”

Kurt was fading fast, but said, “I’m pretty sure that it’s MY boyfriend who is the best snuggler.” Kurt ran his hands through Sebastian’s hair, and then relaxed his hand against his shoulder and fell asleep.

They woke up bodies intertwined and smiles on their faces.

Kurt smiled at Sebastian. “Good morning, handsome.”

“It is indeed.”

“Do we have time to snuggle?”

Sebastian rolled back enough to reach his phone to check the time. “Yes. It’s not quite 7:00.”

“I’ll be right back.” Kurt climbed over him and went to the bathroom. He stopped to look out the window on the way back. “The sun’s getting close to coming up.”

Sebastian got out of bed, went to the bathroom, and then grabbed the fluffy robes on his way back out. He slipped one on, put the other one on Kurt, and then stood behind him and wrapped his arms around him. Kurt leaned back into his embrace. They stood there for about 10 minutes just watching the sun come up over the building next door and start to light up the garden area.

They got back in bed and curled up together.

Sebastian said, “I’m glad we brought those jackets we got in Amsterdam. When we packed in New York, I didn’t realize it would be so much more chilly here than in Paris.”

“They’re fun and they’ll be useful today. That’s one thing that we haven’t done that could be fun.”

“What?”

“Let’s see if we can find a couple of vintage shops in Paris when we go back. We might find something really interesting.”

“I’ll ask Noelle when we get back. No. I’ll ask Zara. She always wears the most interesting and unusual clothes. Maybe she’ll give us a tour of her favorite places to shop one morning or afternoon.”

“Okay. How late is breakfast served?”

“From 7:30-9:00.”

Kurt snuggled in closer, but then scooted back and sat up. “The robes are fluffy, but I like shirtless snuggles better.” He slipped the robe off and put it across the end of the bed.

“I agree.” He took the robe off as well. He scooted closer to Kurt and pulled the covers up over their shoulders. “Much better.” He placed gentle kisses along Kurt’s shoulders. “Are you sleeping soundly now that we switch sides when I’m the big spoon?”

“Mmm hmm. I think it really just came down to me being used to sleeping on my right side. I like it when you’re the big spoon and I like it when you’re the little spoon too.”
“Good because I like both too.”

“I was thinking….”

Sebastian interrupted teasing him. “Umm hmm. As if you’re ever NOT thinking.”

Kurt rolled his eyes and continued. “If we lose the argument with Grandma Smythe about paying the utilities, maybe we can put back money and use a some of it to go see a show every other month. We could rush seats once we’ve saved up. And if you don’t want to go see shows, that’s fine. You could put your money back for something else. It just feels weird to be majoring in musical theatre and starting my fourth year living in New York City and I’ve only seen a couple of shows. I didn’t have the money before, but if I have extra, that’s what I would do with it.”

“I’d like to see more shows. I do like going and watching. And I do still like to perform. That’s why being Cassie’s TA is cool. I get paid to have fun and perform with her – not in front of a big audience or anything, but it’s still fun.”

“Maybe we can find a karaoke place near the apartment.”

“We’re going out dancing when we’re back in Paris.”

“Sounds fun, except I don’t think I brought anything to wear that would look remotely appropriate for clubbing.”

“You can borrow some of Noelle’s eyeliner and mascara and maybe we’ll find something that’s more club style when Zara takes us out. I’ll email her once we get up so she can plan.”

“Are we going anywhere else after today?”

“Outside of Paris? No. Everyone will be back from their traveling and we’ll spend time with everyone before we go. I wanted to go places, but I want to spend time with everyone too. We’ll go out and do stuff around town in smaller groups. I’m not sure where.”

Kurt pulled Sebastian’s hand up to his lips and kissed his knuckles. “We should tell them that if any of them want to come to New York, they could stay with us. Now, that Sam won’t be staying every weekend, we could have guests stay in the apartment more easily.”

“That’s true. Patrice and Leon might be able to work it out as some type of work-related trip if they coordinated with MOMA or the MET.”

“Does Patrice speak English? I never thought to ask before.”

“Yes, quite well. She insisted on tutorials starting when I first got here. It was pretty funny. She was 9 and I was 8 and we played school. I was the English teacher and she was the French teacher. She was a hard taskmaster, making me learn to spell properly.” He laughed. “But I drilled her on her pronunciation. She’s as close to sounding like a native speaker as I’ve ever heard considering she’s never lived anywhere besides Paris and she started studying it in school when she was 8.”

“She could probably apply to give presentations at some of the schools, like Columbia and NYU. She could get paid to come and use the money to pay for the plane tickets.”

“We can talk to her about it. How about you turn over so I can kiss you properly?”

Kurt turned over and kissed him slow and full of passion, without pushing past kissing. It was purely kissing for the enjoyment of kissing. Kurt slipped his arm under Sebastian’s and splayed his
hand between his shoulder blades, holding him close. Sebastian ran his thumb along Kurt’s jaw line feeling the very faint stubble.

“Can you grow a beard?”

“I can. Why?”

“I was just wondering what you’d look like with one.”

“I’ve never left it for longer than a week or so. It doesn’t grow in that quickly, but it would eventually be a full beard. Maybe I’ll leave it grow over winter break if you want me to.”

“Maybe.”

“You like beards?”

“Sometimes.”

“You have time to think about it.”

“I’ve let mine grow before. It’s scraggly looking. I can grow a nice mustache, and the goatee part looks decent. I shaved the sides after I had let it grow out to see what I would look like with just the mustache and goatee. I look like a villain.”

“I can’t see you looking creepy. You have such a beautiful smile and gorgeous green eyes.”

“I don’t really like how it feels, so there’s not much potential for me letting it grow out. On you though, if you don’t hate how it feels, a beard might be super sexy.”

“We’ll see.”

“You think I have beautiful eyes?”

“I’m pretty sure I’ve mentioned that before.”

“Nope.”

“Well, you do. I love to look into them, like I am now.”

Sebastian gave him a quick peck. “Are you ready to get up?”

“That’s a trick question because I would absolutely enjoy lying here all morning and kissing you like that. In case I haven’t mentioned it, I didn’t know how much I liked kissing until we started kissing.” Kurt kissed him and they spent another five minutes kissing like they had been. “I’ll stop, not because I’m tired of kissing you because I’m not, but we have a garden to enjoy and breakfast to eat and a cool place to visit.”

He climbed over Sebastian, or tried to, but Sebastian raised his leg and blocked him and shifted and pinned him to the bed.

Kurt started laughing. “Was my speech not inspiring enough?”

“You can’t escape before I tell you something important.” Sebastian tickled him briefly before he plopped down on top of him. He kissed him gently. “I love you.”

“You’re something.” Kurt laughed, and then flipped their positions. He kissed down Sebastian’s
ribs in a ticklish way, causing him to laugh. “I love you too.”

They walked across the bridge and looked out over the area that was dry at the time.

Kurt said, “I bet it looks really mythical to come out here at high tide, especially if it’s foggy.”

“It would. Fog in photos never conveys the feeling that it does in person. It’s weird to think about this whole section being underwater.”

They continued their trek.

Sebastian said, “Do you want to look through the town and the shops first or do you want to up and tour through the buildings first?”

“I’m excited to see inside. It looks like it will be amazing.”

When they finally made it, they walked all the way around the area and climbed up to look at different areas. They took a few selfies both ways – with the magnificent structures up behind them and with the water behind them sitting on the edge of some rocks they had climbed up. They headed around and went up into the buildings.

“Parts of this are older than anywhere else we’ve been,” Kurt said looking at models. “The oldest building was constructed in the 10th century. It’s really interesting to see the progression through time to see what order the parts were added.”

Sebastian started talking about the parts of the history he knew and Kurt listened as they walked around a little before taking a tour. They stood outside on the west terrace and looked out over the area. “It would be so peaceful to live some place like this. I can see the appeal for sure.”

The bell started ringing and they followed people and went inside the chapel and stood at the back and looked around. The whole area had been built with windows up near the vaulted ceilings and even though it wasn’t ornate like many of the other places they had been, the windows in the domes gave it a really unique look and feel, much lighter and airier. After a few minutes, they left to see other areas.

“This cloister area reminds me of the Harry Potter movies,” Kurt said.

Sebastian laughed. “You’re right. Maybe wherever they filmed it was influenced by similar architectural elements.”

A little later, they came down a set of interior stairs and saw an amazing relief of Archangel Michael appearing to a bishop on the island, which was what inspired the first building. After more exploring, they came across a treadwheel.

“Oh, wow. That’s a lot bigger, but it’s a lot like the one they had at Guédelon. This one is a crane. The ingenuity of people never ceases to amaze me.”

Sebastian looked over the edge. “It was definitely a creative solution to getting stuff up here.”

“There are so many passageways and buildings. It’s like a big labyrinth. There’s signs for us to follow. I wonder if the monks ever did things to mark the way to places in here.”

They spent several hours exploring the buildings before they headed back down into the village.
“There must be 10,000 stairs. Maybe more,” Kurt said on their way down. “No one needed leg day if they traipsed up and down all these stairs frequently.”

Sebastian laughed. He looked back up towards all of the buildings. “This place was built over a period of 1000 years. It’s just amazing.”

Kurt managed to get a shot of Sebastian’s face showing his awe at what he was looking at.

They found a place to eat lunch and they browsed through the whole town area before they headed back to take the bus back into town. When they got there, they walked around town for a little while. They grabbed their luggage from bed and breakfast and thanked their hostess before heading to the bus station to take the connecting bus to the train to get back to Paris.

They got back to Celeste’s house a little after 8:00.

“Welcome back. I have some dinner saved for you.”

“Thank you, Aunt Celeste,” Sebastian said.

“Did you have a good time?”

Kurt said, “Fantastic. Everything was amazing, even getting dirty and making bricks from clay.”

She laughed. “Patrice said you two enjoyed yourselves.”

Sebastian said, “Château de Fontainebleau was spectacular. And Mont Saint Michel was phenomenal.”

Kurt took both bags to their room and Sebastian followed Celeste to the kitchen to help serve their dinner. The two of them continued to talk. Kurt emptied their toiletries and prepped their clothes to be washed. When he finished, he put them in the washer and turned it on. He sat down with Sebastian and Celeste and started to eat. The three of them talked for quite a while.

They hung all of their clothes up on the drying racks and headed to the shower. Once they sat down in the bed to relax, all the walking and stair climbing hit them.

“Are we going anywhere tomorrow?” Kurt asked. He got back up and grabbed his bottle of lotion. He sat perpendicular to Sebastian and put some lotion on his hands. He lifted Sebastian’s legs and laid them across his lap and began to massage his calves.

“Not that I know of. Ow. Don’t stop. Yeah, there.”

Kurt continued to work on the sore spots. “Does Celeste bake?”

“I think so.”

“I’d really like to learn to make the French bread before we leave. I’d like to make it for us once a week, maybe on Sundays.”

Sebastian’s phone pinged with a text. He picked it up, spent several minutes reading it, and then
Sebastian took a deep breath.

“What’s wrong?”

He let it out. “Nothing’s really wrong. It’s just a hard topic. So, Uncle Charles works in the government and he knows the ins and outs of everything. I told him about our dead end with your family. He did some digging and found the records showing that your mother has a younger sister. They did eventually find a death certificate for your grandfather, but he died fairly recently, not a long time ago like you were told.”

“Okay.”

“You mother’s sister lives here in Paris. Uncle Charles went to visit her. He took Aunt Sadie with him. They told her what little they knew and showed her a picture of you. They left Uncle Charles’ number with her and told her to call if she was interested in meeting you, but he told her than he didn’t know if you would want to. So, he’s giving both of you the option. She called a couple of days ago and he told her that you were out of town, but he’d let you know that she had called.”

“So, now I have to decide whether I want to meet her or not.”

“Yes.”

“Text him back and tell him that I do want to meet her. I want answers.”

“Okay.” He texted Charles back. “He’ll give her my number to get in contact with you.” After he laid his phone down, he picked the lotion up and pulled Kurt’s legs into his lap.

Kurt started to hum.

“Sing whatever you’re humming.”

“Okay, but there are partial lines that say the person being serenaded is the ‘night’ and ‘pain’. That is totally not true about you, okay?”

“Yeah.”

Kurt began to sing.

You’re the light, you’re the night
You’re the color of my blood
You’re the cure, you’re the pain
You’re the only thing I wanna touch
Never knew that it could mean so much, so much

You’re the fear, I don’t care
’Cause I’ve never been so high
Follow me to the dark
Let me take you past our satellites
You can see the world you brought to life, to life

So love me like you do, la-la-love me like you do
Love me like you do, la-la-love me like you do
Touch me like you do, ta-ta-touch me like you do
What are you waiting for?

Fading in, fading out
On the edge of paradise
Every inch of your skin is a holy grail I've got to find
Only you can set my heart on fire, on fire

Yeah, I'll let you set the pace
'Cause I'm not thinking straight
My head's spinning around I can't see clear no more
What are you waiting for?

Love me like you do, la-la-love me like you do
Love me like you do, la-la-love me like you do
Touch me like you do, ta-ta-touch me like you do
What are you waiting for?

Sebastian slid Kurt’s legs off of his lap and he rearranged the two of them. He wrapped his legs around Kurt, so they were sitting chest to chest. Sebastian wrapped his arms around Kurt, who matched his position. Sebastian kissed him and leaned back just enough that he could look Kurt in the eyes. “I won’t read into the lyrics too far, but that was really beautiful. And just so you know, I’m waiting for you. I know the lyrics say the opposite, but I think that part of the song is mine to sing to you.” He kissed down Kurt’s neck. “I’m letting you set the pace.” He kissed back up towards Kurt’s ear. “I’ll never rush you, but in light of the song’s question – I’m ready whenever you are. I love you and I know that you love me. And I know that you being ready or not has nothing to do with that. I’m not going to give you some type of ultimatum, ever.”

Kurt turned his head and kissed Sebastian. “I appreciate that. We still haven’t discussed the details, but we can.”

“Well, given what you’ve said, I’m assuming that you will be the top initially and until you’re interested in switching, if you ever are.” He leaned in farther and licked Kurt’s earlobe. “I’m trusting you to introduce me to the pleasures of having a prostate.”

Kurt burst out laughing. “Only you.” He rolled his eyes and kissed Sebastian chastely. “Only you could make me laugh during this kind of talk.” He kissed him again, but passionately this time. “It will be my pleasure to help you become acquainted with that particular part of your anatomy. Definitely my pleasure.”

This time Sebastian laughed. “I’m sure it will be.”

“As for switching, I don’t know. I will say that I don’t think I can handle dirty talk. Swear words, I can handle. But being called things like ‘bitch’ or ‘slut’ or something – I don’t think I can take that right now. Later, I don’t know.”

“I won’t call you names, not that I would have. But I definitely won’t, not even teasingly because the only names I’ll tease you with are things like cupcake and honey bunch.”

Kurt pulled his feet around to his sides and pushed up onto his knees in one swift move and pushed Sebastian onto his back and tickled him. “I am not a cupcake.”

Sebastian started to sing as best he could, given that he was being tickled.

Ooh, sugar pie, honey bunch
You know that I love you
I can’t help myself
I love you and nobody else

“I don’t know the verses. Sorry.”

Sugar pie, honey bunch
I’ll do anything you ask me to
I can’t help myself
I want you and nobody else

“Is that what you’re thinking of when you call me those names?”

“Pretty much.”

“You’re such a sap. I love you so much. But I’m not a cupcake.”

“What ever you say, honey bunch.” He pulled Kurt down and kissed him before he could argue back again.

Kurt relaxed and got caught up in the kissing.

As they walked the last block to the park where they agreed to meet, Kurt stopped in his tracks. Sebastian stopped.

“I just need a minute.”

Sebastian squeezed his hand.

“Okay. I can do this.” He started walking again, letting Sebastian lead the way.

They headed into the park and saw a woman in her late 30’s to early 40’s sitting on a bench alone. Kurt squeezed Sebastian’s hand and walked towards her.

“Are you Danielle Arseneau?”

“Yes. You must be Kurt. And this is your boyfriend whose uncle found me.”

“Yes. This is Sebastian Smythe.”

“It’s nice to meet the two of you. Do you want to sit and talk or walk?”

“Sitting is fine.”

She scooted up to the edge of the bench and turned toward the two of them the best she could. “I’m sorry it took so long for me to call your uncle back. What little he shared gave me a lot to think about.”

“It’s fine. I understand. Once he told me he had found you, I had to think about it as well. I’ll tell you what I know, which is very little. My dad met my mom when she was 22. He asked her to marry him 6 months later. They were married shortly after that. I was born a few years later. She was diagnosed with cancer when I was 8. She died about 6 months later. I was told that my grandparents were dead. That’s all I know.”
“Elizabeth was 5 years older than me. She wanted to go to the US desperately. She applied for every scholarship that she could find. She got a scholarship to go to Ohio. My parents were not happy. A young man two years older than Elizabeth had his eye on her. She was not interested in him, but he was studying at a university here already and had a good career ahead of him. He was the son of a friend of my father’s. He asked for Elizabeth’s hand in marriage. Our parents were very traditional and they had an arranged marriage. My parents agreed and she was due to marry him when he graduated from college.” She paused for a couple of minutes. “Here’s where our stories diverge. My father threatened to disown Elizabeth if she went. She defied him and used her savings to buy a plane ticket to Ohio for the end of August that summer after she graduated. I was sad to see her go, but it’s what she really wanted to do. I figured she’d be back before I graduated and we talked about how she’d write as soon as she could and send me her phone number once she had one. This was before most people had cell phones.”

Kurt nodded.

“So, she left. Two weeks later, my father came home with an urn. He told us that Elizabeth had been in an accident and that he had asked for her remains to be sent back. He buried the urn in our back yard. So, when Sebastian’s uncle told me that she was dead, I wasn’t surprised, but when he said that I had a nephew, I was shocked. I still haven’t told my mother. I wanted to meet you first. I wanted to make sure it wasn’t some insane weird coincidence of names. But the timing all makes sense and there’s no denying that you look like her. Well, you look like a male version, but you have her nose and eyes and ears.”

“That’s true.”

“My father wasn’t an easy man to get along with, but I wouldn’t have thought he would go so far as to fake Elizabeth’s death. Maybe he figured that our mother wouldn’t actually disown Elizabeth and his authority would be undermined. I’m not sure what to think. I married the man he wanted me to, but he was killed in Corsica in 1997. We had been married three years. Victor was two and Clara was a newborn. They are 20 and 18 now.”

“I’m sorry to hear about your husband.”

She looked like she didn’t know what to say. “Thank you, I guess. He wasn’t a kind man and I can’t say that I regret him not coming back. But while I love Victor and Clara more than I can say, I am glad that he wasn’t a part of their lives and that he wasn’t around to provide them with more siblings. After he died, we lived in a one room flat off of his military pension until we moved in with Gabriel.”

Kurt nodded.

“I remarried – a man of my own choosing this time. He’s been a great father to the two of them. They don’t know anything about it. I know I probably shouldn’t keep secrets, but they didn’t really know their father anyway because he was gone most of the time and they were so young. It’s better this way. Gabriel adopted them, so his name is on their birth certificates. They just think we waited a long time to get married since they were four and two when Gabriel and I got married. Tell me about yourself.”

“I’m 22. I grew up in a small town in Ohio. My mom was a French teacher before she had me. She went back to teaching when I was four. I went to preschool that year. As you’ve already seen, I’m gay. That made growing up in a small rural town really hard. I desperately wanted to leave. And I did. The fall after I graduated, I moved to New York City. I’ll graduate next spring from NYADA, which is the New York Academy for Dramatic Arts. I’m musical theatre major, with a minor in costume design. I currently work as a PA at Vogue dot com. Sebastian and I have been here for
four weeks staying with his family and traveling around France, mostly. I’m an only child. My dad did eventually remarry when I was 17. His wife had a son in the same grade I was in, but he died when we were 19. My dad is a mechanic and owns his own shop and he served one term as a US Congressman.”

“I’m going to be honest with you. My mother is a very conservative woman and I find it highly unlikely that she will be anything other than politely dismissive of you given that you are gay. Small mindedness isn’t just a small town Ohio problem. It’s also a problem other places. I don’t want to subject you to that needlessly. If you can excuse me for a few minutes, I’ll call her. If she can be civil, are you interested in meeting her?”

“Yes.”

A few days later, Kurt, Sebastian, and Kurt’s family met at a restaurant for dinner. Things went reasonably well considering the underlying issues. Kurt and Sebastian got along with Victor and Clara and they talked about life in Paris compared to living in the US. Sebastian participating helped Kurt feel less anxious. They went their separate ways after the meal and parted on good terms.

They rotated through all six of the Aunt’s and Uncle’s homes as well as spending the night at Grandmère’s place during their last week in Paris. At Grandmère’s, Kurt and Sebastian taught her how to use Skype on the new Netbook that the family had gotten her. One day, Zara and Nadine took them shopping. Georges and Letti went out clubbing with them. They went to the aquarium with Mathieu, Suzanne, Émile, and Katriane. The evening they spent at Yvonne’s was filled with video games with Damien and Marcel. They spent one day in Montmartre with Fernand, Joanna, Simone, and Garren. Odette turned out to be the baker in the family and she spent one day passing along her skills to Kurt and Sebastian. Kurt was totally surprised by Sebastian’s destination their final Friday. They went to Disneyland Paris for the day.

Saturday morning when they got up, they packed all of their stuff, and helped Celeste prepare for lunch. Everyone was due to arrive at 11:00 for huge pitch-in brunch. Kurt and Sebastian put their new baking skills to the test and made a few loaves of bread. Kurt also made Sebastian’s favorite chocolate chip cookies and a cheesecake.

By the time everyone had arrived, the kitchen counters were covered with food. They went through buffet style rather than the typical serving the meal in courses. They spent the afternoon talking and enjoying themselves.

At 3:00, Kurt and Sebastian had to say their goodbyes. They promised to keep in touch. They stopped and talked to Grandmère last.

“She hugged Kurt. “We all love you and we’re so glad you both came this summer.” She hugged Sebastian next. “I’m so glad to know that you’re not alone anymore. I won’t worry about you so much now.” She put her hands up on their shoulders and looked them each in the eyes and then said, “You two take care of each other.”

They nodded.
“Let me know that you get back safely.”

Sebastian said, “We will, Grandmère.”

They grabbed their bags and waved to everyone as they headed out the door.

By 10:00 that night, they were back in their apartment in New York, lying in bed with Sebastian snuggled up on Kurt’s chest.

“I miss them all,” Kurt said. “I expected to have a fabulous time with you, but I never imagined your family would make me part of the family and now I miss all of them.”

“You can write them too. I believe they all asked you to.”

“I know. I will. Thank you for sharing them with me. It’s what I always thought having a family would be like.”

“Crazy?”

“Exactly. They’re all so different and interesting in their own ways.”

“And you fit right in.”

“Are you saying I’m crazy?”

“Are you implying that you aren’t, cupcake?”

“You just want me to tickle you.”

“Who me?”
Chapter 33

Sebastian was lying with his head on Kurt’s chest, while Kurt ran his fingers through his hair. “What about winter break? We could go back then and stay for three weeks. We could go spend a week in Ohio with your parents and then fly to Paris and stay for the rest of winter break.”

“Plane tickets are expensive.”

“I’ll tell Grandma that’s what we want for Christmas.”

Kurt rolled his eyes.

“I can hear you rolling your eyes. It’s true though.”

“Okay.” He kissed the top of Sebastian’s head.

“Really? You’re going to agree that easily?”

“Mmm hmm.” He continued with the small kisses.

“I loved being there. I love your family. I love you. I don’t want to argue with you unless it’s really important. Actually I never want to argue with you, but if we do end up arguing, I want it to be over something meaningful or important. Arguing that I don’t want to do something that I do want to do seems ridiculous. The money issue is separate from issue of whether I want to go. And I know that you are right. When Grandma Smythe asks you what you want and you give her an answer, she will just get it for you. But we do need to go visit her when we go to Ohio. Maybe we can go to Ohio for Thanksgiving as well. That way we can have time to spend with her and with my parents.”

“Is your dad okay with us, with me?”

“Yes. Carole likes you too. Letting me live here and us becoming friends over time and the fact that you became friends with Sam and Adam, and Elliott to some extent, made a big difference. My dad wasn’t a saint in high school. He can overlook your jackass period to see that you’ve grown into a decent man.”

“You didn’t seem to have a jackass period.”

“I did. Just in a different way. I thumbed my nose at everyone and wore ridiculous clothes just daring people to say something to me so that I could lash out at them for their bigotry – telling the jocks that shoved me for being gay or different or weird that they’d work for me some day, acting all superior. If I had felt more confident that my dad would accept me, I could have talked to him about things and I probably wouldn’t have had so much anger inside. I was mad that I was different. I was glad to be different because being like everyone else would have made me one of those homophobic guys. But there was no easy way to be gay. Dave hid. He passed perfectly. And in the end that didn’t help either because the guys went after him with a vengeance because they felt betrayed. My superior attitude and over-the-top clothes set me apart in a way that kept me from being accused of being a ‘sneaky gay’ who perved on guys in the locker room, but it set me apart to get bullied too. I wasn’t just an easy-going, friendly-to-everyone kind of guy. I had actually considering killing myself before I came out to my dad and before I joined Glee Club. I was a sophomore and I was being dumpster tossed and slushied frequently and I had no friends. Zero. Literally no one spoke to me. Mercedes was actually my first friend. Then we drifted apart junior year. She got really upset when I said I was agnostic or atheist. And not long after that, Blaine
came into the picture and I was off to Dalton. I was a condescending bitch a lot of the time. I was
hurt and I lashed out at times. A lot of it was directed at the people who hurt me, but not always. I
wasn’t a saint.”

“My pretty kitty has claws.”

“You’re the kitty. You practically purr when I massage your scalp or run my hands through your
hair. It’s adorable and it makes me feel really good to make you feel so relaxed.” Kurt massaged
the back of Sebastian’s head.

“I love it when you do that.”

“Mmm hmm. That’s why I do it.”

Sebastian reached up and tipped his head back a little. He ran his thumb down Kurt’s cheek. “Your
skin is so soft.”

“You once said you’d moisturize if someone did it for you.”

“I did. That was such a struggle. I had to think of every unsexy thought I could conjure up to keep
from letting you see just how much you touching me was turning me on – the battle of enjoying
every second of it but not letting it show. And the manicure? Who knew that could be so arousing?
I did not manage to keep my thoughts PG once we were sitting at the table and you couldn’t see my
growing problem. I was in serious need of a cold shower.”

Kurt laughed. “Well, no more cold showers for you.”

“Well, maybe we can play beauty shop again sometime.”

“I think today we have to play laundromat, which isn’t nearly as sexy as beauty shop.”

“That depends on the dress code. If we do the laundry in our underwear, it could be pretty sexy.”

“I suppose it could be. I think furniture mover is on the list as well.”

“Again, sexy furniture moving is a possibility. All the boring tasks will be much more fun for me
if you only wear boxer briefs while doing them.”

Kurt laughed. “I could be persuaded.”

“Do tell.”

“Just ask.”

“It’s that easy?”

“It is.”

“Alright, then. Will you join me in doing our housekeeping wearing just your boxer briefs?”

“I will.”

“Good. We either have to go out for breakfast or see if we left anything in the freezer.”

“There’s two slices of cheesecake in the freezer.”
“Well, then it’s cheesecake for breakfast.” He tipped his head back. “Kiss?”

“Always.”

A half-hour later, they had a load of clothes washing, they had checked their emails, and they were standing in the kitchen feeding each other cheesecake.

“Anything interesting in your email?”

“Auditions are on Friday and the cast list will go up on Monday. Six weeks of rehearsals, with five performances at the end of midterms week. And the play is Angels in America.”

“I’ve not heard of it.”

“We read it in my Introduction to Modern American Playwrights course. It’s a sort of unusual choice since there are typically only 8 cast members because all of the roles are double or triple cast. I’m not sure how it will be done. It could be that all of the parts will be cast separately. What we have to prepare was attached to the email. I’ll just need to print it out. I have the book on my shelf if you want to read it.”

“I don’t know. I’d prefer to see it performed since it’s a play, but I’ll think about it.” He picked up the plate and the forks and put them in the dishwasher. He turned back around and ended up face to face with Kurt, who pinned him the counter. Sebastian gave him a peck on the lips. “Ready to try out our travel backpacks as shopping aids?”

“Not quite.”

“Oh?” he said coyly.

“We have to wait until we can pull the clothes out and hang them up, but I have a good idea of what we can do while we wait.”

“Make a shopping list?” He asked as innocently as he could manage.

“Nope.” Kurt started kissing up his neck.

Sebastian struggled to keep up his game. “Transfer that document to your flash drive?”

“Already done.” He licked the edge of Sebastian’s ear.

“Polish and retreat the leather on our boots?”

“Later.” He kissed along Sebastian’s jaw line, but stopped right before he kissed him. He stepped back to look him in the eyes. “You are playing, right?”

Sebastian closed the space between them and kissed Kurt passionately. When they broke for air, he said, “Definitely. If I’m ever not in the mood or don’t have time, I’ll be clear and I won’t tease.”

“Okay. I don’t want to push you.”

“You’re not – not at all.”

Kurt leaned in and they kissed again. “Salsa lessons. I want to be able to really dance with you, like Miss July, but better.” He waggled his eyebrows.
“It’s always better with you. She’s good, but you’re hot. When we come back from shopping we’ll start with the Salsa lessons.”

The washer beeped.

“We’re being paged to the laundry closet. Shall we?” Kurt put his arm out for Sebastian to take as if they were headed out to the dance floor for a formal dance.

He wrapped his arm around Kurt’s.

“I think I’ll need to make some sort of interior bags for the backpacks for this to really work,” Kurt said as they emptied everything out.

“If you think you can design something that will make them work for less than getting something different you can. Or we can look on Amazon and see what our other options might be.”

“Let’s do that first before I start a sewing project.”

“Why don’t you go put our other load in and I’ll keep putting this stuff away? Then we can move the desks and bring your pleasure reading books into our room and I’ll move my schoolbooks to the other room. And we can put the keyboard in our room.”

“Sure.” Kurt came back 10 minutes later. He put the last few things away. He wrapped his arms around Sebastian and hugged him. He turned and grabbed his backpack and took it down to their room and slid it under their bed.

Sebastian was right behind him and put his underneath too. He pulled the drawers out of his desk and sat them on the floor. They carried it into the other room and brought the keyboard back. Sebastian sat the stand down where the desk had been and Kurt put the keyboard on. They each grabbed a couple of drawers and went back. They moved Sebastian’s desk into position and put the drawers back in.

Kurt turned to pull some of the books off the shelf. He put them on the bed as he went. Sebastian started bring some in from the other room. Kurt grabbed a stack of his and moved them to the other room. About a half-hour after they had started, they had everything flip-flopped.

The washer buzzed again and Kurt and Sebastian went to tackle the last of the laundry. Kurt put things on hangers and Sebastian tossed stuff in the dryer and turned it on. Then he began to undress Kurt from behind. He didn’t protest, but tilted his head a bit and Sebastian just smiled and chuckled and continued with his task. Once he had everything unbuttoned, he undressed himself and laid his clothes out on their bed. Kurt came in half-dressed.

“Why are we removing our clothes?”

“Because we’re going to Salsa.”

“Naked?”

“In our dance shorts.”

“Ah. That makes sense.” Kurt turned and took his out of the dresser and put them on and put his clothes with Sebastian’s on the bed. “Shoes?”
“Jazz shoes.”

“So, we’re going to watch this video of this couple that I found online. It teaches the Salsa sequentially and the girl is the same height as the guy and she is not in heels. So, I thought it would be a good start for us. I can’t do those lifts over the head where you do plunging twirls down to the floor. We’re too close in size for that. So is this couple. We could do this with you leading and me following, but honestly you are so much better than me at the hip isolations and hip movements in general. Plus, you have the confidence in your strength to do back walkovers and things that I’m just not that good at. If we do other types of dances where those skills aren’t so important, we can switch and you can lead. I don’t think of you as a girl.”

Kurt put his index finger up to Sebastian’s lips, and then stepped closer and kissed him. “It’s okay. I’m not offended. One of us has to lead and one of us has to follow. It’s a dance. That’s the way they work. It may take me a little bit to get used to being the one that follows, so be patient. I love you and I want to dance with you. Let’s watch the video.”

After a half-hour of dancing, they stopped to rest for a few minutes. They watched a video while they sat down.

“The arm and hand movements are really tricky,” Kurt said. “And I’m going to have to work on my spotting to not end up dizzy when you spin me in place when we get to that point. But I really like it. How about you?”

“I like it too. It’s so much better with you.”

“I’m assuming you had girl partners.”

“Always. You’re a much better dancer than any of them were.”

“I’ve never really considered myself all that talented. I worked hard in Miss July’s classes, but maybe I’m still just hearing the echoes of the past bouncing around in my head. But talented or not, I will work at this until I’m good at it. And once I’m good at it and at reading your signals, we’ll be able to dance without having an exact routine and we’ll feel comfortable doing it.”

Sebastian stood and reached out for Kurt. He left his phone on the table and wrapped his arms around Kurt’s waist. Kurt put his hands on Sebastian’s shoulders and kissed him gently.

“This is going to be a lot of fun. But I’m hungry. Let’s make lunch and prep like we normally do. We’ll dance more later.” He dance-walked Kurt down to their room and opened the dresser drawer with their undershirts and they each grabbed on and put it on to go cook. When they got to the kitchen, they put their aprons on and worked in their methodical way, eating while a few things simmered and boiled.

Later that afternoon, Sebastian skyped with his grandmère and gave her a tour of the apartment using his phone. Kurt waved from the sofa where he was working on memorizing what he needed to have prepared for his audition. When Sebastian came back in the room he lay down on the sofa and grabbed one of the smaller throw pillows and put it in Kurt’s lap and lay down on his side. Kurt automatically switched the sheets of paper he was holding to his other hand and began to run his hand through Sebastian’s hair.
Three Sunday afternoons later, Sebastian had barely spoken to Kurt since the Tuesday after they came back – the day their classes had started again and when Kurt had gone back to work. Isabelle managed to snag another hour a day out of him and he went directly from work to the rehearsals for the play. Sebastian had known that he would be busy after he had been cast in the play, but this was a level of insanity that Sebastian could not tolerate. He had taken an Uber back from Costco for the third week in a row, which Kurt covered the cost of because he couldn’t go.

Kurt’s costume design instructor found it to be reasonable to expect her students to show up to NYADA on Sunday mornings to work 8 hours each Sunday on the costumes for the play. Since there were only 8 people play all of the roles, the costume changes had to be quick. Kurt was the only person in the play that was also in the costume design class, so he was the only one working both aspects of the production.

When Kurt finally came home at 7:30 Sunday evening, Sebastian was sitting in the living room. He got up as he heard Kurt putting his key in the door. He put a casserole dish in the oven and turned it on. He hit the timer on his phone and walked towards the door. Doing that gave Kurt a chance to take his shoes off and put his bag next to the shoe cabinet out of the way. Sebastian stepped closer, and then he took Kurt’s hands and interlaced their fingers and looked him into the eyes.

“We need to talk.” He stepped a little closer and kissed him gently. “Come on.” He let go of one hand and led Kurt down the hall into their room. He shut the door behind them and began to undress Kurt.

“Sebastian, what are you doing? It’s 7:30. I have a bunch of stuff I have to get done by tomorrow morning still.”

“I’m undressing you and taking you to the shower unless you’re saying ‘no’, in which case, I’m going to take you into the living room so we can talk in there.”

“I don’t have time to talk. I have a paper I have to turn in tomorrow morning.”

“I know. So is that a ‘no’ you don’t want to shower with me right now?”

“It’s not that I don’t want to. I don’t have time to.”

“Kurt, look at me. You told me to defend you from yourself. You’re running yourself into the ground. We had a really nice Labor day two days after we came back, but since then I’ve barely seen you. You haven’t come home at dinnertime. You come in, grab your cold dinner from the fridge, and stay in the other bedroom working on schoolwork until 1:00 in the morning. You shower quickly, climb into bed, snuggle me, and fall asleep – only to get up five hours later and rush off to NYADA before I get up. You let Isabelle convince you to work an extra hour a day. What about you? What about us?”

Kurt crashed into Sebastian, who caught him and wrapped his arms around him. “It’s too much. I guess I didn’t realize it had been three weeks.”

“So, is that a ‘yes’ to the shower or are we going back to the living room?”

“Shower.”

Kurt started undressing himself. He went in the bathroom and turned the water on and got in. Sebastian followed him into the shower.

Kurt switched places with him and wetted Sebastian’s hair and grabbed his shampoo and began to
wash his hair. Once he had rinsed it, he kissed him. “I’m so sorry. Can you forgive me?”

“Yes, of course. I’m not throwing a fit and demanding your attention. Let me do your hair, please.” He reached for Kurt’s shampoo and washed his hair, massaging his scalp gently. “This isn’t a ‘pay attention to me’ issue. This is a ‘you’re going to make yourself sick’ issue. I don’t even know if you’re eating lunch.”

“Sometimes.”

“Look at me. You’re hurting yourself. You’re hurting the person I love most in this world. I need to know how to help you. You’ve finished two of the six weeks of rehearsals, and then you have tech week and the performances. That’s five weeks before this is over. That’s too long for this to continue.”

“It’s because of me that the costuming is being done on Sundays for 8 hours. Normally, they would just meet for two hours a day and work on them, but since I can’t be at NYADA for two hours each afternoon, the compromise was to move it to all day on Sundays. Trust me. No one is pleased about it. And today, I stayed again to work on the paper. I needed books from the NYADA library to do it.”

Sebastian took one of the washcloths he had grabbed and reached for the soap to wash Kurt.

“I don’t know how to say ‘no’ to Isabelle.” Kurt handed him the soap. “And I’m really, really sorry. I never meant to neglect you. I love you. Please don’t break up with me.”

Sebastian finished their shower by rinsing them both and got Kurt out. He dried quickly and moved into the bedroom and folded the covers back.

“Come on. Get in bed with me so we can keep talking.”

Kurt walked around the bed and lay down on his side facing Sebastian.

“Listen carefully.” He ran his thumb across Kurt’s cheek. “This isn’t about you neglecting me. I’m still eating three meals a day and sleeping 8 hours a night. I’m not burning the candle at both ends and running out of wax to burn. I’m not intervening because I’m insisting on getting one of the few hours you’re spending sleeping.” He leaned forward and kissed Kurt chastely. “I’m not breaking up with you. I love you. We both knew that being in the play would be hard. What we didn’t know was that you would be doing the costuming for the play as well as being IN the play. And Isabelle is being selfish. She knows how busy you are. You don’t have time to work an extra hour a day for her until after the play. You can use that hour to eat and study. That way you can go to bed an hour earlier each night.”

Kurt barely nodded. “I love you too. I’m sorry.”

“You’ve already apologized more than once. I’m not angry about you not having time to make out with me, although I do miss that. I’m upset that you aren’t sleeping enough and that you’re skipping meals.”

Kurt leaned forward to kiss him. Sebastian didn’t let it get past chaste kissing.

“I’m not easily distracted by your wily sexy ways. You’re not going to be able to kiss me into dropping this subject.” He ran his hand along Kurt’s upper arm. “I already put dinner in the oven. We’re going to lie here together until it’s done. After we’ve eaten, you’re going to look at your schedule. Something has to go. I’ll call Isabelle myself and tell her that you’ll be in the Monday after the play, if I have to. But when you’re done looking at it, you will have time to sleep at least 7
hours a night and eat three meals a day, even if you eat them while you’re doing schoolwork or while you’re walking from place to place.”

“Okay. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I know you would do the same.”

He leaned forward and barely touched his lips to Kurt’s and started their little kissing game. After a few minutes, Kurt was the one to press in and really kiss Sebastian. He didn’t stop them this time and he kissed back passionately. A few minutes into their kissing, Sebastian’s phone timer went off. He pulled back and placed one final peck on Kurt’s lips and rolled onto his back.

“Dinner’s done.” He slipped some pajama pants on and went out to the kitchen.

Kurt put sweatpants on and followed him. He pulled his iPad, a notebook, and a pencil out. He grabbed his phone as well. He put them on the table and opened his calendar app on his phone, opened the spreadsheet he used to track his weekly schedule on his iPad, and turned the notebook to a blank page. Sebastian sat his plate of food next to him and sat down on his other side. Sebastian slid the iPad to where he could look at it. He stared at it for several minutes.

“There really isn’t anything you can do, is there?”

“Other than not going to work, no. If I eliminate any of those other things, the ones in blue, I won’t be able to graduate on time. I can guarantee that my schedule will be just as insane if I get a part in the spring musical. Maybe even more crazy because I’ll have music and dance rehearsals as well.”

“They really don’t want people to be able to work, do they?”

“Apparently not.”

“Those classes should be worth more credits. The dance classes are every day and you only get one credit. I know there isn’t written homework, but everyone has to practice on their own time or they won’t pass. No one can just show up and do what is done in class and that’s it.”

“Well, I can’t change how they assign the credits for the classes. I just know that I can’t drop any of the classes that I have, and they all require either bookwork or practice time.” Kurt pushed the notebook away and pulled his plate in front of him and started to eat. “Thank you for cooking for me. I guess they think everyone eats and lives in the dorms too. No time to prep meals or commute is built in. And being in the performance is an extra curricular activity that I get no credit for, despite being told that I was expected to audition and get a part.”

Sebastian looked at it again. “The only solution I see is for you to take a leave of absence from Vogue. You’ll have to do it again in the spring.” Sebastian took a screenshot of Kurt’s weekly calendar that he had in a spreadsheet. He slid the iPad back towards Kurt. “Email me that screenshot please.”

Kurt emailed it to him like he asked. “I feel better knowing that you don’t see a solution either, like I’m not just whining and being lazy.”

“Lazy isn’t a word I would ever associate with you.”

“When I was having mini-crises in France, like when we first got there and I was looking out over the Seine and we were talking. I was afraid we’d come back and you would decide that I’m not worth the hassle. I was afraid that I’d get so busy that you would just give up on me.”
“I’m not giving up on you or on us. Has your entire college experience been like this?”

“Being this busy?”

“Yes.”

“That’s hard to quantify.”

“Last semester you were very busy, but you still ate with me and Sam every evening and you went to bed on time and slept a reasonable amount. That’s what I was expecting again. This is obviously more than last semester because you had time to go out with us every other Saturday and to spend with me on Sundays.”

“To answer your question, I have been this busy before, but the difference this time is that I’m in a production and I’m working on the production as well. This is the most busy I’ve been on purely school related activities. I don’t have the option of offering my shift at the diner to someone else and scrimping on what I eat. I worked more hours back then, but I had to devote fewer hours to schoolwork. I can’t slack off on anything production-related because that affects other people.”

“Right.”

“If I quit or took a leave of absence, I could get the costuming moved to before the rehearsals which is when they would have normally been. Then, I would have Sundays free again.”

“Well, that would be a good start. I know you don’t want to do it, but you do have savings that you could dip into for the next five weeks to cover your food and miscellaneous expenses.”

“I do and I could.” Kurt got up and put his dishes in the dishwasher and packed up the leftovers and washed the baking dish. “Dinner was delicious.”

“I’m glad you liked it. I will make dinner and have it ready every evening at 8:00 rather than at 6:30, if you will come home and eat with me.”

Kurt nodded.

Sebastian brought his dishes over and put them in. He grabbed a towel and dried the baking dish and put it away in one of the lower cabinets. “A small box came for you yesterday. You didn’t notice it, I guess. It’s on top of the shoe cabinet.”

“Okay. I’m going to go read through what I’ve already written. I’ll be back.” He took the box with him and came back 15 minutes later. “I think I can make it reasonable in 30 minutes.”

“And then do you have anything else to do?”

“Yes, but I’m not going to do it. If I get called on in class, I’ll just say that I didn’t have time to read it. But most of the time the instructor in that class never calls on anyone. If he does, he does. I’ll be back out in 30 minutes.”

A little over a half-hour later, Kurt came out and called for Sebastian. He put his book down, turned off the lights, checked the door, and followed Kurt into their room.

When they entered, Sebastian saw that the covers were folded back neatly, their pillows had been stacked on the stool to the keyboard, and a couple of towels had been spread out across the bed. He
“Will you please lie down? Undress first though.” Kurt began to undress himself.

Sebastian tossed what he had on into the laundry basket and lay down on the bed face down. Kurt tossed his clothes in too. He grabbed the small bottle that had come in the mail and got on the bed and straddled Sebastian. He opened it and put a few drops of the oil on his thumb, closed the bottle loosely, put it on his side table, and spread the oil to his other thumb and to his fingertips.

“The massage oil came. I order one called ‘Hint of Vanilla’ because I didn’t know how strong the smells or taste would be.

“Taste?”

“Mmm hmm. This massage oil is safe for human consumption.” He began rubbing up Sebastian’s spine and moved to his shoulders once he had reached his neck. He slid his thumbs down and massaged from his shoulder blades up towards his neck.

The oil was being absorbed while still leaving enough slickness behind to provide a nice non-pinching massage with no stickiness. It was just like Kurt had hoped it would be.

He leaned down and licked along Sebastian’s neck while he continued the massage.

“Oh, God. Safe for human consumption. I get it. You can lick it without it making you sick.”

“Exactly.” Kurt finished massaging Sebastian’s back, neck, and upper arms. “Turn over.” He put a little more oil on his fingers and started to massage Sebastian again, running his thumbs over the most sensitive parts of Sebastian’s chest, followed by licking him.

Sebastian bucked up.

Kurt leaned down and kissed him. “I’m getting there.” He kissed and licked down his neck.

“I’m assuming it comes in other flavors.” Sebastian was already back in bed waiting for Kurt after their second shower of the evening.

Kurt got in bed and lay down facing Sebastian. “It does. Since I’d never tried it before, I decided to go with something really mild because I didn’t know how strong the flavor or smell would be. Something like mint chocolate or chocolate covered cherries sounded fun. We can try others later if you want.”

“Oh, I definitely want to. Where did you learn to do what you were doing with your hands?”

“Oh, there were written directions on how to pleasure your man for the maximum enjoyment of the product.”

“Well, their directions were well written.” He moved forward just a bit and kissed Kurt. “That was amazing.”

“I agree. Thank you for intervening.”

“You’re welcome. I won’t stand by and let people hurt you, even if you’re the one hurting yourself. You asked me to make sure you didn’t let yourself get pushed to the bottom of your own priority list. And even if you hadn’t, I would have stepped in to point out what you were doing to yourself.
You’ll be no good to anyone if you’re in the hospital, or even just at home, lying in bed sick. When did you order that oil?"

“The Monday after we got back. It was out of stock and back ordered. I think it must be the most popular flavor. I’ll go back to the website and leave them a 5 out of 5 stars and a glowing review.”

“You can send me a link and I’ll do that as well as tell them how appreciative I am of their excellent product use directions.”

Kurt laughed. “You do that.”

“I will, you know.”

“Oh, I know. I also know you’re a very fast learner because you used the very same technique. I give it a 10 out of 10.”

“I’ll add that to my glowing review.” He pushed forward and kissed Kurt again. “I missed you. As amazing and awesome as the, um, enhanced massage was, this is what I miss most. Lying in bed, or anywhere really, and talking to you. My right hand and I had become reacquainted lately. I can live with that. I did for a long time. But not getting to spend time talking to you, I miss that. You mean a lot more to me than just being a sexy playmate in bed or the shower. I actually turned in a paper without your input and it just felt so wrong. I always refine my papers after we talk about them. You make me think about things I hadn’t considered. Please don’t think I’m putting pressure on you. I just need you to know how much you mean to me. We were friends before we were lovers.”

“I’ll do what I can to fix it. Is that enough, though? If I can’t do anything besides survive the next five weeks, will that break us?”

“This isn’t some kind of manipulative ultimatum. I love you and I mean that. Five weeks of things being hard isn’t going to break us, but things can’t keep going as badly as they have for the last three weeks or five weeks from now, I’ll be caring for my sick boyfriend who can’t perform in the show he’s nearly killed himself to be in. You already said that that you’ll eat lunch every day, you’ll do your schoolwork you need the library for in the afternoons instead of going to work at Vogue, you’ll come home and eat with me at 8:00, and then you’ll do your regular schoolwork here. That should allow you to go to bed by 11:00 and sleep for 7 hours a night.”

“Yes.”

Sebastian rearranged and got Kurt to scoot closer and lay his head on his shoulder. He ran his hand along Kurt’s upper arm. “We’re not broken. We’re fine. I love you and you love me, right?”

“Yes. I love you and I don’t want to hurt you.”

“I know that. I need you to tell yourself this, okay? Tell yourself – Sebastian loves me.” He waited for Kurt to say it, but he didn’t. “Out loud, right now, please.”

“Oh, okay. Sebastian loves me.”

“Sebastian isn’t angry with me.”

“Repeat that?”

“Yes.”

“Sebastian isn’t angry with me,” Kurt repeated.
Sebastian kissed the top of Kurt’s head. “Just remember that, okay?”

Kurt nodded. “I have one addition to the list.”

“What’s that?”

“I want to go back to showering with you, even if all we do is shower.”

“Well, I’d like that.”

“You grabbed me when I just about let myself get blown off the dock back out into the choppy water. Thank you.”

“I have no intention of losing you. I didn’t see any visits with Mr. Salazar on your weekly schedule.”

“That’s because there haven’t been since the first week back. The past two weeks I haven’t gone. He didn’t have any openings when I could get there.”

“Can you go back and find out when he does have openings so you can see if you can find a way to fit him in?”

“I can.”

“Good. As much as I feel like talking to you for the next several hours, I’m not going to. But I’m not going to keep the fact that I want to hidden. I want you to know how very much I love you and how much I like to spend time with you. I don’t want you to feel guilty, even though I know you will. I want you to know that you’re important to me. If I’m quiet and stoic about it, you might think that I don’t miss you and I can’t have you thinking that.” He moved and turned towards Kurt and kissed him. “I love you. I’m going to climb over you so you can be the little spoon.”

Kurt scooted forward and Sebastian climbed over him and they got snuggled up. Sebastian kissed his shoulder. Kurt brought Sebastian’s hand to his mouth and kissed it.

“I love you too.”

Kurt opened the door and stepped inside. He closed it behind him quietly.

“Mr. Hummel, have a seat, please.”

He sat down.

“It has come to my attention that my ridiculous musical theatre program has stolen Ms. Wright’s very capable personal assistant. I had quite the earful from my dear friend this morning over the coffee she insisted that we go out for. She says that my program is unfair to working students. She may have broken some personal boundaries by sharing your personal schedule with me.”

“It’s not exactly a secret. If you looked in my file, you could make the very same spreadsheet yourself.”

“True. She did make a valid point. The requirement for seniors to participate in the fall and spring productions without that requirement fulfilling any actual school requirements is actually unfair. As is the practice of requiring the Advanced Costume Design course students to design costumes for both productions outside their course time and with no credit given for the work that is done.
This situation will be dealt with in committees until I am satisfied with the outcome, but until then, I am personally overriding your intensive writing course on early theatre history. You have previously demonstrated your high level of writing skill in a variety of other courses in English and in French in which you have received A’s. You, and the other five members of the Advanced Costume Design class, will receive 3 credits for the semester and will be titled as Advanced Costume Design Practicum on your transcripts. It will be graded pass/fail. You will return to working for Isabelle. And my life will be easier when my good friend is not angry with me on your behalf. Good friends are hard to come by and I have no intention of losing any of mine over a situation that should have never happened. The design work should have always received credit because working on the costumes is required. Being in the production itself will also receive credit. The seniors who do not get parts will be enrolled in a practicum in the future that will also be graded pass/fail. You may choose which of your other courses to drop or you can keep all of the others and take fewer in the spring.”

“Well, honestly the history course is what has been killing me. The professor has been requiring us to write five pages papers each week using books that are only available in the NYADA library as reference books.”

“That seems to be a bit much, even for a course that’s supposed to be an intensive writing course.”

“I thought so, but speaking up isn’t really looked highly upon here. Do you mind me speaking frankly?”

She put her elbows on her desk and propped her head on her interlaced fingers. “Go ahead.”

“The professors and instructors here are as catty as the divas. It may very well be that the point of their behavior towards us is supposed to be to prepare us somehow to deal with finicky directors and choreographers.” He paused.

“You have something else to say. Go on,” she said.

“It was brought up by someone I know who does not attend school here that perhaps NYADA students have a high success rate in getting cast in shows, not because of their high level of skill, but because the directors know that the NYADA students are used to being bullied and they won’t speak up for themselves which allows the directors to make ridiculous demands and the NYADA students will comply without complaint.”

“I see. That’s not really the reputation the school is attempting to attain.”

“I’m sure it’s not. But the instructors and professors here don’t make the students feel important or mentored. We feel called out and put down. We’re told repeatedly that if we’re not willing to put in the work, there’s a long line of people behind us who will be. And while that is probably true, it doesn’t make people feel hopeful about their chosen career field. If we felt more confident in our skills, we would perform better at auditions. We have to fake our confidence because we have none. We don’t make friends here because we are constantly told that everyone is our competition. I honestly struggled for weeks this summer about returning here for the school year. I knew I had started off behind in the race. I worked my butt off to get caught up. I chalked a lot of my struggles my second year up to dealing with my personal life. I was pulled in too many directions. Then last fall, I made the wrong choice. You gave me the opportunity to rectify that, which I appreciate. But the spring semester should have been one of calm learning. I had a job that didn’t require me to work insane shifts. I had a calm place to live. But I found that I didn’t enjoy being here any more than I had before. The professors and the instructors do not make us feel welcome here. With the reviews at the end of each semester dictating whether we stay or wash out, no one ever feels relaxed here. People stay because they want to work on Broadway and they think this is the best
way to do it. People don’t stay because they love it here. For the cost of this year’s tuition, I could have enrolled and completed a musical theatre program at one of the SUNY campuses, even if none of my credits from here transferred. The cost of one year here is more than the in-state tuition for four years at a New York state school. If I don’t get a Broadway role, I’m looking at 10 years of loan repayments that I will have to make working a job that I could have worked without going to college. I thought I would come out of NYADA ready to take the world by storm, that I would learn what I needed to know, and that I would be confident because I was prepared.”

“And you don’t feel prepared?”

“No. I feel tired and exhausted because I haven’t slept for more than 5 hours a night in three weeks. I feel like this school is an elite school for people who are capable of being berated constantly whose parents are wealthy. I only fit one of those requirements. I have what it takes to persevere and I will, provided that what I’ve said today doesn’t get me a one-way ticket to being washed out at the end of the semester. But if you asked me to be an ambassador for the musical theatre department at this school to go out and recruit students, I would turn the position down.”

“I’m disappointed to hear that.”

“I’m disappointed that I feel that way. I wanted this to be the amazing college experience that people talk about – that warm, fuzzy way that people talk about their ‘alma maters’. Instead my college days will be filled with memories of how I was told that I wouldn’t make it, how I wasn’t trying hard enough, how there were 50 other people waiting to take my place, and how I’m going to leave NYADA having made only one close friend with whom I never had any classes with and who only attended here one semester that I did and a small group of people that are acquaintances most of whom I’ve shared no classes with. That’s why I said this school should be for rich students because those of us who have to work outside of school time don’t have the time or money to socialize. And maybe all of these things are only true for the performance majors as opposed to the students working on degrees for the production side of things. I wouldn’t know. But I would have to say that my general impression has been that the Apples who are not performance majors seem to be more cheerful. My dad took me to a Rockettes show before I started here. I went to see Rachel in her show with tickets she provided and I’ve seen one other show as a gift. I’m training to work on Broadway and I can’t even afford tickets to go see shows. All of the students who walk around talking about rushing tickets for this or that or how they went to see every show this year, that’s who this school is for. Those of us who aren’t rich, aren’t seeing any shows because we’re busting our butts just trying to not live on the street while taking out loans to pay tuition that costs three times what someone working full time at minimum wage makes in a year.”

“I see.”

“And the caste system here is as bad as the jocks in high school. Allowing the performance majors to look down on the non-performance majors is really a shame. Without the production side of things, the performance majors would be acting and singing in whatever they can come up with on their own, standing on an empty stage with just the overhead stage lights on. There would be no magic, no transformation to another world, leaving their performances dull and certainly not worth people paying over $100 each to watch.”

“You have a lot of opinions, young man.”

“I do. Lacking opinions is never something I have been accused of.”

She laughed. “I suppose not.”

“Being asked to share them is rare. Maybe NYADA is the kind of place that people like Rachel and
Blaine need, and some rich divas can hack it once they get over themselves and others can’t. But people like me and Adam and some others, we were never divas and we didn’t need knocked off pedestals. We came here because we thought it would be the place to learn to be the best we can be. But I’m pretty sure that I could be better than I am. Being told I’m doing things wrong and criticizing me doesn’t tell me what to do instead. Leaving me to figure it out on my own isn’t teaching.”

“A valid point.”

“I’ve heard ‘It’s not my job to spoon feed you. You have to work on self-improvement.’ And while I agree that hard work is part of the process, not telling someone the goal is like sending people out to train for a pole vaulting contest when they thought they were competing in high jumping. Someone can spend a whole semester working on their personal presentation during performing by working on their posture and foot placement or their eye contact while the professor wanted them to work on their facial expressions. Someone could work on their ‘diction’ by practicing their consonants all semester to find out that they were inappropriately using glottal stops or they were sighing into their vowels.”

“Appropriate feedback is needed for improvement. We can agree on that.”

“When we get evaluations back that just have our performance graded on a rubric where the professor has checked our level of proficiency, but does not indicate what we did not do, it is useless as far as feedback goes. For example, if we get five areas graded and we get one area marked with a 5 and four areas marked with a four and there is no written feedback, we get a 21/25 – an 84 which is a B, but we have absolutely no idea what to do differently to get an A. Being told that our dance moves are sloppy doesn’t tell us which part of our movement was wrong or how to correct it.”

“It sounds to me like the school has a lot of room for improvement. First and foremost, perhaps we should look into some form of student government or a committee to bring these issues to the faculty so that no one student is singled out and made to feel like they will be washed out of their program by speaking up.”

“That’s a good idea. Also, maybe include a way to evaluate the teaching staff that is 100% anonymous. You’ll always get a few people who will leave mean comments just because of personal issues, but if the evaluations are taken as a group, the personal attacks could be eliminated.”

“Also a possibility.”

“Maybe it’s time for a reassessment of the purpose of this school. If it is truly meant to be the best training program for Broadway, then maybe it should be a two-year program that only teaches performances courses. No Broadway performer actually needs to know the history of theatre design to be able to perform well in a modern Broadway theater building. None of the people in the chorus of a show really needs to be a good essay writer. If this is a university fine arts program, then those other courses are important for a broad education and understanding of the field, but if it is a training school then they aren’t. Maybe the school could provide both – a certificate program that shows the person completed two years of intense training and also a BFA program that would allow people to go on to graduate school or perform.”

“There are other schools in this city that provide two-year training programs.”

“There are also other schools in this city where I could have spent the same amount of money and had many, many more options for completing my other educational requirements that weren’t
performance-based. This school has very narrow focus. I’m just suggesting perhaps more truthful recruitment and advertising materials. Or maybe just a recalibration of the programs so that the teachers make people actually want to come here each day rather than dread it.”

“Do you dread performing for me?”

“Am I going to be washed out if I say something unflattering?”

“No. You can count this as completely neutral from my coursework with you.”

“Yes. I dread it. I have anxiety attacks.”

“Why?”

“Because you are unpredictable and you sit completely stoic while I perform. Performers are people who interact with the people they perform for. You make each and every one of us feel as if we are doing a terrible job because you do not seem to be even the least bit entertained by our performances. It’s disheartening and it’s frustrating. I leave every time wondering whether you’re going to fail me. Mine is probably personal as well. The first time I performed for you, you sat there stoically, but then afterwards, you said something quite flattering and then a few weeks later I received a rejection letter. And rather than do something as simple as say something to me or to Mr. Schue at Nationals, you just let me get rejected over something that I had no control over. Maybe the application process needs to be completely in the hands of the students. If had been required to send that in myself, I would have stood in his office until he filled it out so I could send it in. But I trusted him to do it and I was punished for that. Rachel choked, stalked you, and then got accepted.”

“The application process has been amended.”

“That’s good. Perhaps if you’re trying to grade us without giving us feedback as we perform, it would be better for you have us record our performances and for you to grade them from the recordings. Performing for someone who looks like they’d rather be anywhere than listening to me sing is nerve-wracking. Unless of course, that’s the whole point – to make us as uncomfortable as possible while we perform and to make us perform in the most stressful situations. I don’t even know anymore. I feel like up is down and down is up. We’re torn down to build our skills up? We’re supposedly the best of the best, but we’re constantly berated. Which is it? Are we the best or are we worthless?”

“Well, this has been an enlightening conversation, but I have someone else to see in a few minutes. I will answer your last question. The students here are the best. You and your classmates are not worthless.”

“So, to recap before I leave – I am no longer enrolled the intensive writing course. Is there an administrative way to allow me to return the book I bought for credit towards my books for next semester or something? I have no need for the book on a personal level. They’re readings specifically for this course that the professor compiled.”

“I will write a note to that effect, yes.”

“And I will stay in my other courses and sign up for fewer courses in the spring. Also, I want to make sure that you notify the bursar’s office that these changes are administrative so that I am not billed for the additional hours like I was last fall. That mess cost me small fortune. There are very detailed rules about changing courses after the official drop and add period ends, which has already happened.”
“I will do that as well.”

“And as you consider revamping, redesigning, or rebranding, I think maybe whatever committee does that should consider what an 18-year old could do with the nearly $300,000 that it costs to live in New York City and attend this school for four years. Is the potential for getting a lead in a Broadway play high enough to justify a $300,000 expenditure? All I can say is that I hope so.” He stood up. “I do appreciate you changing the costuming class and being in the production so that we will receive credits and for exempting me from the history course. I might actually be able to sleep enough now. And I’m sure that Isabelle will be happy for me to not quit.”

She smiled. “I’m sure.”

He opened the door and closed it behind him.

Kurt walked into the apartment a few minutes before 8:00. He slipped his shoes off and put his bag down and went to look for Sebastian. He found him in the spare room at his desk.

“Hey, handsome.”

Sebastian looked up and took his earbuds out. “Hey, gorgeous.” He got up from his chair and before he managed to take a step, Kurt pulled him into a hug. “Well, that’s the best greeting I’ve had in ages.”

Kurt kissed him. “Well, this is the best day I’ve had in three weeks. I’m guessing my schedule found its way to Isabelle courtesy of you. She had a fit about it during a coffee date with Madame Tibideaux, who relieved me of my requirement to take that history class that was making me spend so much time in the NYADA library to write a 5-page paper each week. So, that class is gone from my schedule. I’ll be back at Vogue tomorrow and my costume work for the play will be done before rehearsals starting tomorrow. So, now I will be able to come home and eat at 8:00, do a normal amount of homework and have time left to sleep every night. And I’ll have my Sundays back.”

“Excellent.” He kissed Kurt. “Dinner should be done. Let’s eat. Is this the kind of homework you can do sitting next to me on the sofa?” He kept one of his arms around Kurt’s waist as they walked into the kitchen.

“It is – mostly.”

“Even better.” He took the lid off the crockpot. “I made one of the soups from the cookbooks we brought back.”

“Mmm. It smells good.” He pulled two bowls down.

Sebastian ladled the soup out and put the bowls on the table. Kurt grabbed spoons and filled glasses of water for them.

Kurt reached out toward Sebastian. “Dance with me?”

“Dinner and dancing. I’m one lucky guy.”

Kurt pressed a playlist on his phone and laid it on the table. He took Sebastian’s hand and moved into position to follow Sebastian’s lead. He closed his eyes and focused on relaxing and learning Sebastian’s way of guiding his partner. By the end of he first song, he was already getting the hang
of it. Sebastian didn’t lead by force. His movements were subtle and gentle, which is why he had
missed out on his cues when they had danced together before. By the end of the third song, they
were beginning to really move together. When it ended, Kurt kissed Sebastian. “I really like
dancing with you.”

“We’re getting the hang of it. You’re so much better than you think. I could tell that you let
yourself relax and feel the movements.”

“I did. Let’s eat while the soup is the right temperature. How did your day go? What’s your
favorite class so far?” Kurt asked.

By 10:30, they were snuggled up in bed.

“Are your parents going to stay with us when they come to see you in the play?”

“I didn’t actually tell them yet. It’s not exactly an uplifting play. I’m not sure it’s a good idea for
them to come. I don’t know of any reasonable way to invite Dad without inviting Carole.”

“I didn’t realize it was a depressing play.”

“It is. But now that I get to come home and spend time with you, that will help offset the effect of
the play. Until this evening I didn’t realize how much it was getting to me. Dancing and eating and
then snuggling while I studied did a whole lot to lift my spirits. Thank you for intervening before I
crashed completely.”

“We’ll be here for each other, right? That’s the whole partnership aspect of a relationship.”

“Right.”

“So, for Thanksgiving, do you think your dad would let us use one of their cars to drive to
Columbus to see Grandma? I’m trying to figure out whether to fly to Columbus and borrow or rent
a car to drive to your parents or fly to where your parents are and then drive to see Grandma.”

“I’d imagine that it’s cheaper for us to rent a car and drive from here to Wheeling and return the
car when we get there, and then use one of my parents’ cars to drive to see your Grandma.”

“I’ll look into that as well.”

“Have I told you how awesome you are lately?”

“Not using that exact term, no.” He nuzzled into Kurt’s neck.

Kurt scooted back into his chest tighter. “Well, you are. And wonderful too. Sweet, sexy, loving,
and kind. Helpful.”

Sebastian smiled.

“You’re an amazing boyfriend.”

“I try.”

“Well, you’re succeeding. I’m going to do better. I know you said that you weren’t angry with me
and I’m glad, but I don’t ever want to lose this.”
“I’m not going anywhere. And I intend to keep you. All mine,” he teased and kissed the back of Kurt’s neck.

“Are you going to give me a hickey?”

“I didn’t figure you’d let me.”

“Maybe if you let me give you a matching one. I’ll think about it.”

“Okay.” He kissed him again. “I love you. Let’s go to sleep.”

“I love you too.”

The last week in October, midterms and tech week arrived. Sebastian was busy studying and writing papers and Kurt was gone all day and every evening and didn’t come home for dinner. They had known and prepared. Kurt took both lunch and dinner with him each day when he left in the mornings. Sebastian ate the same shelf-stable dinner so he didn’t have to take time out to make a meal when he came home.

Opening night was a preview night for students, family, and friends only. Sebastian dressed up and headed to NYADA with plenty of time to spare. He was stopped about 10 feet back from the door and asked to see his ID and to show his ticket. There was a sign on an easel next to the person checking IDs.

No one under 18 admitted unless accompanied by a parent. No one under 14 allowed.

He was a little surprised by the sign, but took his seat in the audience and waited. He put one of the playbills he picked up in his bag with his iPad to keep it nice and neat. He looked through the other. He read through the cast bios. Kurt’s was listed at the top. He had the lead. Sebastian smiled as he read it again.

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Prior Walter, man in the park

portrayed by Kurt Hummel

(BFA ’16 – major: musical theatre, minor: costume design)

Kurt moved to NYC four years ago to pursue his dream of performing on Broadway. He would like to thank those who believed in him and have supported him in pursuing his dream.

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He realized how short Kurt’s was compared to the other students who listed other productions they had been in, both at the school and professionally. He sighed. He looked through the rest of the playbill and found Kurt’s name listed with the costume designers as well.

Backstage, Kurt was getting the last of his make up on. He glanced at the edge of his small section of the long counter that all of the men shared. Sebastian had brought him one orange gerbera daisy to Vogue earlier that afternoon, which made him smile every time he looked at it.

“Someone sure has you smiling,” one of the girls working on his make up said.

“My boyfriend. He’s a sweetheart.”
“Short, dark, and too much gel? He never really struck me as the ‘sweetheart’ type.”

“Not him. He’s been out of the picture for ages. You know Miss July’s TA for the advanced classes?”

“Tall and sexy? Dances like a dream?”

“That’s him.”

“Good for you. He totally seems like the sweetheart type.” She looked him over. “You’re good to go.”

“Thanks.” He looked at the flower one more time before he headed to the stage area.

On their way home, Sebastian wrapped his arm around Kurt’s waist. On the subway, he moved his arm to Kurt’s shoulder and held him close. When they got back off and were back above ground, Sebastian kept Kurt close.

“I should have told you what it was about. I’m sorry. I offered to let you read the play and you said you’d rather wait to watch it, but I should have spoken up anyway.”

“No wonder you reacted the way you did when I confronted you that night. I’m so sorry. If I had known what you were portraying, I would have approached you differently. I know I wasn’t mean, but I would have been softer and more gentle.”

“You were fine. You were kind and gentle. I was just in a bad place. It’s been a long six weeks. It’s been really hard. I just have four more performances and then I can try not to think about it so much. You’ve been really sweet to me. I put the flower you brought me on my part of the vanity counter. It made me smile every time I saw it.”

“I wasn’t expecting to see your backside on the stage.”

“I was supposed to be fully naked in that doctor’s office scene. I refused. I have no interest in doing full frontal nudity for a play. It was bad enough to have to design underwear that made it look like I wasn’t wearing any for that scene where I’m a prostitute getting fucked in Central Park. That’s a unitard that I custom dyed to match my skin tone and I painted it in a way that made it look like my ass was on display. I didn’t want that at this point in my career and probably never. I’m a very private person.”

“Well, I give you an A for design and an A for standing up for yourself. There was no need for nudity in the doctor’s office scene. Him ‘examining’ you by lifting the paper gown so that it blocked the audience from seeing your privates was fine. I do kind of get the importance of Roy taking his Mormon undergarments off, but I’m not sure that it being done that way was necessary, but I didn’t write it or direct it. And while I understand the need for it to actually look like you two were having sex, I think your costume was perfect. I couldn’t tell from where I was sitting that you were wearing anything, but I am actually glad that you are. I was imagining how uncomfortable that scene was for you. I cried. I’m glad you’re not actually uncovered. That has to make it a little better.”

“It makes it bearable, but still it’s not an easy scene for me to do.”

They walked in silence for quite a ways.
“I see why you didn’t invite your parents. I should have taken that as a big hint and gone ahead and read the play.”

“I’m just glad I have no classes tomorrow. Those of us in the play have been given the day off. Tomorrow night the press and the public will be able to attend. I’m nervous about that. But at least I get to relax some during the day.”

“I’ve already taken my midterm and turned in my papers so I don’t have to go to class tomorrow morning.”

“I vote we lie around in bed or on the sofa until I have to go to work.”

“Sounds perfect.”

Kurt poured some of the water from his water bottle into the cup holding his flower. He looked at it until he was only thinking about Sebastian and how loved he felt. He headed for the stage for their official opening night.

Sebastian was waiting for him in the hall where the cast stood along the wall with a cord separately them from the crowd. They signed a few autographs and talked to whoever wanted to talk to them. Every time Kurt looked up and made eye contact with him, Sebastian winked at him, which made him smile every time.

Saturday, there were two performances so Kurt couldn’t laze around all day, but they did lie around watching ridiculous TV shows before he had to leave for the performances. Sebastian was there afterwards again. This time he brought dinner for the two of them and they ate together outside at a picnic table in the courtyard.

“The New York Times printed a short review,” Kurt said. “I didn’t even bother to look since it’s just a school production, but one of the guys had a copy.”

“Was it a good review?”

“It was. I was mentioned by name. We’ll grab a copy on the way home tonight.”

Sebastian noticed how down Kurt looked. “Just two more performances.”

Kurt nodded. “Yeah. We’re more than halfway through. Monday will feel so strange. No last-minute costuming issues and no rehearsal.”

After they finished eating, Kurt went back inside to prepare for the evening performance. Sebastian headed to the NYADA library to do work on his senior project paper for a while. He had already picked up the DVD he wanted earlier. He had cooked and prepped for his surprise for Kurt that evening.

About 30 minutes before the cast would be coming out, Sebastian took up his position in the hallway. When Kurt came out, he looked to the exact spot where Sebastian was standing and smiled. Kurt signed autographs for a while before the cast went back into the stage area.

When they got home, Sebastian ushered Kurt into the apartment. Sebastian, Sam and Lexi said, ‘Surprise!’ Kurt’s face lit up and he moved swiftly to hug Sam.
“I’ve missed you so much. Don’t wait so long to come again.” He let go of Sam. “It’s good to see you too, Lexi. I like the red Star Trek onesies. They’re fun and really soft and fluffy.”

“Go change into yours,” she said.

“We have onsies?”

Sebastian said, “We do. Come on.”

Kurt followed him to the bedroom.

“I got you blue ones and me gold ones. I thought they’d be more fun than robes for the winter. We can slip them on when we get out of bed.” Sebastian kissed Kurt and started to undress him. “Do you not like them?”

“I do. A lot. I’m just surprised that Sam and Lexi here. I didn’t even think about it being Halloween today. I love Halloween and I completely missed getting ready for it.”

“Don’t be upset. It’s been a hard week. I made treats and Sam brought some stuff. I rented a DVD. We’re going to go have fun.”

“I need to shower first. I’m gross and I don’t want to put on nice clean pajamas feeling so disgusting.”

“Go get started.”

Kurt went in the bathroom and got in the shower. Sebastian knocked a couple of minutes later.

“Is there room in there for me?”

“Always, but I’m just taking a quick shower.”

“That’s okay. I’ll take a quick one too. I’ll feel better putting mine on clean too.” He gave Kurt a quick kiss and got busy lathering his own hair and washing quickly.

Ten minutes later, they were in the onsies and Kurt was on the sofa snuggled into Sam’s side with Sam’s arm around his shoulders. Lexi was on Sam’s other side with her head on a pillow on his lap.

“Now, when did I turn into the butler?” Sebastian teased.

“Um? When you came in the room last. We played ‘not me’ and you weren’t here so you got picked,” Sam said.

“I see. Get up you oafs. The food’s done. Help me put it out on the table.”

Lexi got up, but Kurt didn’t move.

Sam finally stood up and pulled Kurt to standing. He didn’t stay that way long though. He wrapped his arms around Sam’s neck from behind and jumped up. Sam caught him behind the knees and carried him the 10 feet to the table. Kurt didn’t let go. Sam laughed at him.

“You’re a lot heavier than Stevie or Stacey. I can’t carry you around forever.”

“You can’t just not visit for so long. I haven’t seen you in three months. I’m going to hold on tight while you’re here.”
“You can hold on tight all you want, but can you do it with your feet on the floor?”

“Fine, but we’re snuggling during the movie.”

“Deal.”

Kurt slipped down. “Everything looks great, Bas. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

Everyone grabbed plates and filled them. Sebastian had made several types of sandwiches and cut them in quarters diagonally, making them triangular. He also made veggie tray with dip. Sam and Lexi brought some carbonated fruit juice drinks and sliced apples and caramel dip and chopped nuts, mini marshmallows, and mini chocolate chips for the toppings.

“Star Trek marathon?” Kurt guessed.

“Nope. I found a copy of *Hocus Pocus.*”


They finished eating and put the leftovers in the fridge. Everyone piled on the sofa, except Sebastian, who turned off all of the lights first, and then sat next to Kurt, who was snuggled up against Sam again. As soon as Sebastian sat down, he pressed play. Kurt looped his leg over Sebastian’s and grabbed for his hand and pulled it up to his mouth to kiss it. Kurt interlaced their fingers and put their hands on his thigh. Sebastian scooted a little closer. Kurt looked over at him and offered him a kiss, which he leaned into and smiled.

Kurt slipped the onesie off and got in bed after he brushed his teeth. He slid in behind Sebastian. He slipped his right arm under Sebastian’s pillow and his left arm around him and squeezed. “I love you so much. Thank you so much for the surprise Halloween party. It was great.”

“I’m glad you had fun.”

“I’m not sure that Lexi likes me though.”

“I think she just doesn’t understand you and Sam.”

“You can explain it to her. I trust you. I just can’t right now. I’m doing everything I can to focus on good things.”

“I know. Let’s go to sleep. I love you too.”

Kurt decided to take a long shower the next morning. Sebastian knocked on the spare room door quietly. Lexi opened it. Sebastian motioned for her to come out. She followed him out to the living room.

“Kurt told me that I could tell you why he and Sam are the way they are.”

“Okay.”

Sebastian explained everything without saying anything specific about Kurt’s past or how Sam had
broken off their friendship.

“He was bullied.”

“That’s an understatement. I’m not going to go into the things that happened to him because that’s his story to tell.”

“I can respect that.”

“Sam and I talked a lot because I wondered the same thing. I straight up asked him if he was in love with Kurt. He told me that he loved Kurt deeply, but not romantically and not sexually at all. Sam is not even remotely bi. He’s straight. Kurt is no threat to your relationship with Sam whatsoever.

“Okay. Sam told me that, but I only spent a little time with you two that day and then last night Kurt was all over Sam.”

“I left out one part. Kurt’s mom died when he was 8. His dad is not a touchy feely kind of guy. He’s a little better now. But Kurt went years with no kind touches, other than maybe a pat on the shoulder from his dad every now and then. He was touch starved. Sam taught him that being touched could be enjoyable and good.”

“It’s just kind of weird to see Sam so physically close to Kurt.”

“I know. But once you get used to it, you’ll be fine. Just join in and it will be like a puppy pile. You’ll see how emotionally hard this play has been on Kurt when you see it this afternoon. I had planned to go to each show to support him, but I couldn’t sit through it again. Once you see it, you will understand last night better.”

“Now, I’m not sure that I want to see it.”

“You can opt out if you want and stay with me.”

“I’ll think about it. I’m going to look it up on my phone.”

Kurt headed off to NYADA to get ready for the final performance that would start at 3:00. Sam, Lexi, and Sebastian went to Costco and took everything back to the apartment. Sebastian stayed behind to put everything away and cook. Sam and Lexi left to go watch the play. Once he finished cooking a few things and put them away, Sebastian left for NYADA as well. He took up his position in the hallway like he had done for every performance.

Sebastian saw Blaine coming toward the area. He texted Sam, but stayed where he was. Rachel, Jesse, and Mr. Schue came down the hall not far behind Blaine. Sam texted Sam again, naming the additional arrivals.

Sam arrived a few minutes later and got in line like everyone else, but he didn’t take his eyes off Blaine.

As soon as the actors came out, people started asking for their signatures on their playbills. Kurt saw Blaine in the crowd and froze. Sebastian moved closer and pushed his way through and stepped over the cord and stood near Kurt. Rules be damned. He wasn’t going to leave Kurt there alone.
Rachel moved closer. “You were very good, Kurt. Very convincing.”

“Thank you.”

Blaine moved closer to Kurt and Sebastian stepped closer as well. He looked like he was going to say something and lost his will to say it with Sebastian standing there. “You were very good.”

“Thank you.”

Mr. Schue approached him next. Rachel was still standing nearby.

“We saw you in Finding Neverland. You were really good.”

“Thanks. I’m enjoying it a lot. I missed performing more than I had realized. You did a great job today.”

“Thanks.” Kurt stepped away and turned to a few other people waiting to talk to him. When the crowd died down, he went back into the stage area.

Sebastian approached Blaine quickly. “If you care or ever cared at all, just stop being where he is.” Sebastian turned and walked to where he was meeting Kurt, Sam, and Lexi.
Kurt went into the backstage area and thoroughly removed the stage make up, more so than he had done the other nights because he knew he wasn’t going straight home. He still had the costume side of his part in the play to complete. He slipped on the sweats and t-shirt he had brought with him. He dried the end of his daisy off and put it in a zip-top bag neatly and then inside a binder in his bag to keep it flat. He got up and helped the costumers collect up all of the costumes and hang everything needed to go to the cleaners or be washed on one rack and all of the other pieces, like belts and shoes, on another. They moved everything to the area where they belonged. When he was done an hour later, he headed out to the hall to meet up with Sebastian.

While Kurt was backstage, Sebastian met up with Sam and Lexi.

As soon as he walked up, Lexi said, “Wow, that was intense. Rehearsing that for how long?”

“Six weeks, five days a week,” Sebastian supplied.

“Rehearsing that for that long would be really tough.”

“It has been. Personally, I’m glad it’s over. He did a great job though.”

Sam said, “He’s good, like really good. I’ve never seen him in anything, except when we did Rocky Horror because Blaine beat him out for Tony. But seeing him in this, he would have been good as Tony or any character for that matter.”

“I’m glad the two of you came. He really needed a break and some fun last night.”

“I’ll do better about making time to come. I’ve made new friends, but they can’t replace you and Kurt. I don’t want either of you to feel that way.”

Sebastian nodded. “He misses you, but I think dealing with this particular play made it harder. Maybe you can come again after Thanksgiving, but before winter break, even if it’s just for the day.”

“I’ll work on it. Even if Lexi’s too busy, I’ll make a way to come. We’re going to head out. We need to drive back and get a few things done tonight. We’d wait to see him again, but you said it will be over an hour and by then we could be back.”

“He knows you’re heading back. I’ll wait for him.”

When Kurt opened the door, he found Sebastian sitting on the floor in the same spot he had been standing each evening when he came out to greet people. Sebastian stood up and opened his arms. He knew that Kurt wouldn’t want to get any stage make up on he clothes, but he offered the hug anyway. To his surprise, Kurt practically fell into his arms. Sebastian held him close. They stood in their tight embrace for several minutes.

Kurt took a deep breath. “I’m glad that’s over. I had considered that Rachel might come, but I hadn’t given any thought whatsoever about Mr. Schuester showing up. And of course, I had asked Blaine to leave me alone, and he had for so long that I hadn’t given him any thought in ages.”
“He should learn to do what people request.”

“Well, I’m not going to dwell on him. He’s not part of my life. Let’s go to the dance studio. I can take a quick shower and we can dance a little?”

“Sounds fun.”

When Kurt came out he was wearing the same sweats, but he had left the shirt off. While he was gone, Sebastian had taken his socks and boots off, cuffed his jeans to keep them from dragging, and taken off the hoodie he was wearing. When Kurt came out, he shut the door to the room. He sat facing Sebastian and opened his legs and reached out to him. He mirrored Kurt’s position and took his hands. They leaned forwards and backwards stretching. They moved to the barre and stretched more.

“I’d really like one of these at home,” Sebastian said. “Maybe we can come up with a way to get one that folds up or assembles and disassembles easily.”

“We can look into it. Ready?”

“Yes.”

Kurt connected his iPod to the speakers. He pressed a playlist that had the Salsa song they’d worked on and a few other songs they frequently danced to. Kurt and Sebastian began to move together, in and out, mirrored feet movements, Kurt’s arms and hips moving in rhythm with the music, and Sebastian holding him, twirling him, and supporting him.

What they didn’t see was Cassie July opening one of the doors at the side of the room so that she could observe who was dancing. When the song ended and Sebastian kissed Kurt, she looked away to give them their privacy. When a new song started, she looked in again.

They began dancing again, in a more traditional ballroom style. They had been working on their balance and counterbalance to give a more flowing feeling to their movements since Sebastian couldn’t lift Kurt repeatedly or carry him the distances that were typical for the style of dance.

She watched and saw what they had come up with to work as a pair that was so close in size. She was impressed with the apparent ease with which they danced knowing that what they were doing looked deceivingly easy to the viewer. She closed the door quietly and walked around to the main door and opened it and stepped in.

They saw her, but continued to dance. When the song was over, they didn’t say anything and moved right into the next piece. When it finished, Kurt moved to the speakers and paused his iPod.

“Should we leave? Is there a class this evening?”

“No, there isn’t. I came to watch the play this afternoon and get some grading done. I have midterm videos to watch, as you know. And I heard music that wasn’t music from the video, so I followed it. You two are really good together. Kurt, I like how you’ve compensated for the fact that Sebastian isn’t strong enough to actually do some of the lifts by using your own strength to counterbalance what he’s doing. It’s very creative.”

“Thank you,” Kurt said.
“You were really good in the play. That wasn’t an easy role.”

“It wasn’t. Thank you.”

“I’ll let you two get back to dancing and I’m going to go back to grading.” She left the room.

Kurt started the music again.

When they got home, Kurt said, “Can you give me a few minutes in the bedroom?”

“Sure. I’ll go ahead and start to warm dinner up.”

“Thanks.” He pecked Sebastian on the lips and headed into the spare bedroom for a minute and then into their bedroom.

He plugged a short cord into the outlet on his side of the bed. He opened the box that had come the day before and unrolled the rope lights and plugged them in. They were the soft old-fashioned, warm white colored lights, not the new LED bright white. He pulled the bed away from the wall about a foot. He used extra strong adhesive Velcro squares to attach the rope lights to the bed frame.

When he finished, the rope lights went up the back of the headboard, across the top edge, down the other side and around the underneath of the bed frame. He pushed the bed back to it’s original position, which was about three inches from the wall, making sure the wooden blocks that he had put behind the legs to keep the headboard from hitting the wall were back where they had been.

He stepped back to view his handiwork and was pleased. He used the dimmer switch on the cord and turned the lights down so they weren’t so bright. He shut the door behind him.

“Sebastian?”

“Yes?”

“Can you come here, please?”

“Dinner’s done. Do you want to eat first?”

Kurt walked towards the dining table. “Sure.” He sat down and ate with Sebastian.

They ate quickly and loaded the dishwasher.

“What did you call me down to our room for?”

“Let’s turn all of the lights of and go to bed, okay? We’ll shower first still, but I just want to lie in bed with you, unless you have homework to do still.”

“I don’t. Last week was midterms, so no new assignments are due tomorrow.”

Kurt checked the door and stepped into the hallway. Once Sebastian was in front of the bedroom door, Kurt turned the alcove light off.

“Open the door and go in.”

“You put lights on our bed.”
“We can make them dimmer or brighter. At their brightest, we can read in bed. And they can be
dimmed more than they are.” Kurt shut the door behind him.

Sebastian just stood there looking at them without saying anything.

“If you don’t like them, I can take them down.”

“What? No, don’t take them down. I like them.” He wrapped his arms around Kurt from behind.
“They’re romantic and sweet. And I’ll be able to see your beautiful face better when we talk in
bed.” He kissed Kurt on the back of the neck. “Let’s go shower and try them out.”

They came out of the bathroom with their towels wrapped around them. Sebastian followed Kurt
around the bed and shut the top half of the shutters. He went to see what Kurt was waiting to show
him.

“I attached a dimmer over here where they’re plugged in.” Kurt demonstrated how bright and dim
they could be. He readjusted it slightly dimmer than it had been before.

“May I?” Sebastian reached for Kurt’s towel.

Kurt nodded. After Sebastian took it, Kurt folded the covers back a little and slipped under them.
Sebastian came back in from hanging their towels up and got under the covers too.

“You got flannel sheets since last night.”

“I bought them this morning at Costco. They looked cozy and since we like sleeping without
pajamas now, I thought they’d be nice. They’re cream colored with pine trees. They match the
quilt and blanket.”

“I like them. Thank you.”

“I like the lights. I like being able to see you. The light from the windows was good sometimes, but
it was still really dim. I like this better.”

Kurt scooted closer and slid his arm under his pillow so he could get really close. “Thank you for
coming to meet me after every show.” He ran his thumb down Sebastian’s cheek. “It really meant
a lot to me to be able to come back home with you rather than come back alone.”

“You’re not alone.” Sebastian started their feather-light kissing.

Kurt kissed back and forth a few times, but then stroked his thumb down Sebastian’s cheek
again. “Remember when I was massaging your legs after we climbed all those stairs at Mont Saint
Michel?”

“Yes. And I remember asking you to sing the song you were humming.”

“And afterwards we talked and you said you were waiting on me.”

“Um hmm.” Sebastian kissed him on the cheek.

“I want to, if you’re sure.”

Sebastian kissed him, slow and gentle. He pulled back after a few minutes. “Does that mean you
want to talk about it again or you’re ready?”
“I’m ready. I have what we need.”

Sebastian returned to kissing Kurt passionately. “Yes.” He kissed down Kurt’s neck.

“Look me in the eyes, please.”

Sebastian stopped and looked Kurt directly in the eyes. “I want this with you, Kurt.”

Kurt nodded and kissed him. “I need to get a few things to have ready when we need them, but if you change your mind at any point, we’ll stop, okay”

Sebastian nodded. “I seriously doubt that, but I know you’ll stop if I say to.” He kissed Kurt one more time before he let him get up to get what they needed.

Kurt was lying on Sebastian’s chest, propping his weight on his elbows, and kissing up Sebastian’s neck, all the way to his ear, which was causing him to moan lightly. “You okay?”

“Never better.” He turned his head and met Kurt’s lips with his own. He moved his hand from Kurt’s back to the side of his face and ran his fingers through his hair. “I love you.”

“I love you too. We’re a mess. Do you want to go shower again?”

“Yeah, in a minute. I just want to lie here and enjoy how I feel, which is amazing, in case you’re wondering. I feel so loved and cherished.”

“Good.” Kurt caught his lips in a passionate kiss. He went back to kissing down Sebastian’s neck and licking all of the places that turned him on. “I want you to feel loved because I love you so much. I want to switch.”

“Tonight or at some point in the future?”

“Now, if you you’re not too tired.”

“You’re sure?”

Kurt pushed up and looked Sebastian in the eyes. “I’m sure. I trust you. Do what I did and it will be fine, just like it was for you.”

“If you’re sure.”

“I am. I love you and I want my first time to be with you.” He kissed Sebastian again.

Sebastian grabbed Kurt’s shampoo bottle and pour a little into his hand. He put the bottle back and startled to lather up Kurt’s hair. “Are you okay?”

“Mmm hmm.” He tipped his head back to rinse the shampoo out. Once he did, he stepped closer to Sebastian and kissed him. He began to wash Sebastian’s hair. “It was perfect. Thank you for being patient with me.” Kurt grabbed the sprayer and rinsed Sebastian’s hair and put it back. He began kissing him again. “I never imagined being so vulnerable and enjoying it.” He grabbed Sebastian’s washcloth and began to bathe him. “Letting my walls down to let you in has been the most scary and liberating thing I’ve ever done. You touching me, us showering together, sleeping without our pajamas, letting you hold me while we sleep, everything working up to tonight, and
tonight.” He grabbed the sprayer again and rinsed Sebastian.

He pulled Kurt close after he put the sprayer back. He started bathing Kurt next. “I will do everything in my power to never lose the trust you’ve extended to me. And you know that I trust you too. At least I hope you do. I love having no walls between us. I’ve never had that with anyone either. It’s amazing. I love you so much.” He kissed him.

“I do know that you trust me. I love you too.” He let Sebastian rinse him. “Ready to get out and snuggle?”

He kissed Kurt. “Definitely.”

“Do you want me to leave the lights on low like this or turn them off?”

“Leave them. I still want to be able to see you.”

They lay on their sides and rearranged until their legs were entangled and they had their arms around each other and their other hands with their fingers interlaced. Kurt kissed Sebastian gently.

“I’d like to take you out tomorrow evening. Neither of us should have anything super pressing for Tuesday,” Sebastian said.

“Sure. I get off work at 2:00, unless Isabelle wants me to start staying until 3:00 again.”

“I get out of class at 2:00. I’ll come to Vogue then. If you’re not done, I’ll just hang out in Isabelle’s office and do some reading.”

“Okay.”

“Are you going to start staying until 3:00 if she asks you to?”

“That’s what she wants. She said two hours a day isn’t enough. Plus, you’re wanting me to ask for four weeks off for winter break.”

“You’re right. I need to put forth my best effort at charming her tomorrow. She will not be happy that I want to whisk you away and take you back to France.”

“Plus, I will be income-less for four weeks. I missed out on four weeks pay this summer. That one assignment offset one week of pay, but another month off, and I’ll have to dip into my savings. If I work the extra hour per day, for six and a half weeks, that’s 32 extra hours, which is not quite three normal weeks of pay. I’ve been saving up what I can for our trip to Ohio for Thanksgiving.”

“I’m still working on the details.”

“I know. I trust you. I’ll leave it to you to persuade Isabelle. I’m choosing classes for next semester this coming week. We were told Friday that the auditions for the spring musical would be during finals week and the cast list would go up that Friday. Rehearsals will start the first week of class.”

“Oh, wow. I didn’t think about it, but that makes sense. Rehearsals for the play started early as well.”

“The musical will be one week earlier in the semester since spring break follows midterms.”
“Did you find out which musical was chosen?”

“Not yet.” Kurt wiggled a bit because his arm was falling asleep.

“Are you uncomfortable?”

“Just a little. My arm is. Will you hold me?”

“Always.” Sebastian kissed him. “How? Do you want to lie on me or be the little spoon?”

“I’m actually getting kind of sleepy. How about you?”

“I’m will lie still and hold you, however ever you want to sleep.”

“Are you always going to be this sweet to me?”

“Yes?”

“Is that an answer or a question?”

“It an answer that I thought you already knew. I love you. I will do anything in my power for you. If that’s holding you so you can sleep well, then that’s what I’ll do, now until forever.”

“I love you too. I want to talk more, but the last several days of tension have all been pushed away by your loving touches, and now I’m ready to rest. I’ll be the little spoon.”

Sebastian gave Kurt one last kiss, and then got up and went around and climbed into the bed while Kurt scooted forward. Before he slipped under the covers completely, he rolled back and reached down and turned the lights off. He rolled back over, scooted up behind Kurt, and pulled the covers over their shoulders.

Kurt pushed back into him. “Mmm. I really love snuggling with you – in here, or on the couch, or even when you hold me so I’m pressed back against you when we’re standing up.”

“I like it when you’re close to me.” He placed small kisses on the back of Kurt’s neck. “Tonight was amazing.”

“It was.” Kurt’s voice was drifting off. “Goodnight, mon abri. I love you.”

“I love you, mon feu.”

The next morning, Kurt woke up still snuggled up in Sebastian’s embrace. He held still and enjoyed the closeness and tenderness. He thought back to the night before about how gentle and loving Sebastian had been with him. Soothing his fears without making him feel ridiculous for having them, even while nervous that he would do something wrong and hurt Kurt and not asking why he had been so afraid, but treating him like he was precious and important to him. Kurt was surprised that he had been able to relax so completely and allow himself to get lost in the feelings. He hoped that Sebastian woke up feeling as positive about the choices they had made last night as he did. He didn’t have to wait long to find out because Sebastian started to stir.

“Good morning, gorgeous.”

Kurt could hear the wink in his voice. “Good morning, beautiful.”
“I’d like first dibs on your upcoming Saturday morning.”

“You have something in mind?”

“I do. I’m thinking we revisit the amazing massage oil and we pamper each other all morning. Massages, making out, making love, more making out, showers, facials, manicures, more making out, maybe more love making – what do you think?”

“I’ll be sure to ditch whatever’s on my Saturday morning schedule and put you in as soon as I get the chance.”

Sebastian laughed. “I’ll add it to my calendar as well. I know you’ve been going straight to NYADA when you get up and doing yoga and combat training before going to the library to do schoolwork. Do you think I could sneak in as Cassie’s PA? I could do schoolwork in the NYADA library and then go to dance.”

“They’re just student led groups and I don’t see why not. It’s not like there’s a fee to join. You just have to sign a release from liability form since it’s not an official NYADA class.”

“Would it bother you if I go today to see if it’s okay for me to participate?”

“Why would it bother me?”

“Not mixing you private life and school life, I guess?”

“Oh, I guess you’re right. I did want that. But not with you. Having you with there would be fun, not stressful.”

“You’re sure? Please don’t say something just because you think it’s what I want to hear.”

“We said we wouldn’t do that, and I’m not. I really like being with you. You don’t ever make me feel like I should be anything but myself. Remember when we were talking and I said that I figured that I would need a break from you after about a week of 24/7 and I was genuinely surprised when being around you didn’t make me ‘decharge’?”

“I remember.”

“Well, that’s still true. If anything, being around you is like a continual charge and when I’ve been away from you for a while and we’re together again, it’s like instant recharge. When you waited for me in the hallway after each performance, the instant I came out and saw you there, it was like I could breathe again. And every time I would look up and you winked at me, it made me smile, and I’d feel more energetic.”

“Really?”

“Absolutely. I’d love for you to come with me to see if it’s okay. If it is, you could come any morning you want.”

“The only downside is if I get up and go with you, there’s zero chance of me convincing you to stay in bed with me and make out.”

“How about we go this morning and we’ll make out tonight when we get back from our date?”

“Hmm. You drive a hard bargain. But I already have you here in my clutches, waa–aaa-aaa.” He kissed down Kurt’s neck and just barely play bit at his shoulder.
“Halloween was two days ago, Mr. Vampire.” He brought Sebastian’s hand up to his lips and kissed his knuckles. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I suppose I could be persuaded – just this once – to skip yoga and combat training. I do love you so very much and this is super cozy. The flannel sheets were a trap.”

“Ah, you’ve figured out my ruse. Whatever will I do?”

“Well, I’m going to go to the bathroom and brush my teeth while you figure out whether we’re snuggling and making out or whether we’re going to go do yoga and combat training.”

Kurt slipped out from under the covers and slipped the Star Trek onsie on that was laying across the end of the bed. He zipped it quickly and went into the bathroom. When he came back out, Sebastian was waiting in his onsie right outside the door. He went in and came back out a few minutes later.

“I’ll go once and it if it’s fun and I’m allowed, I’ll go with you every morning. I won’t try to keep you in bed and ruin your fitness plans.”

Kurt kissed him. “Alright.”

Max said, “Sebastian, good to see you.” He put his hand on Sebastian’s shoulder. “You are aware that coming here and training will not help you kick his butt? He’s better than the rest of us.” He shoved Sebastian teasingly. “Put your mat down. We do yoga first to stretch.”

“Thanks. I don’t need to kick his butt, but the rest of you, on the other hand.”

“Just because you can tap dance circles around us doesn’t mean we can’t take you in a bo staff fight.” Lawrence said.

Max said, “Don’t get all high and mighty, Lawrence. Kurt might have been training him personally.”

Kurt smiled and lay out on his mat, ready to start class.

Sebastian was reading in Isabelle’s office when Kurt was ready to leave at 3:00. Kurt texted him and he put his book away and walked across the hall to Kurt’s closet of an office.

“Hey, gorgeous.”

“Hello, handsome. I’m ready to go. Are we going home to change?”

“Yep, well you don’t necessarily have to change, but we’re leaving our bags and non-essentials at
home. “

“So, home, then back out to wherever you’re taking me. I’m excited.” He put his mini-messenger bag on cross-body and put his bag up on his shoulder and reached out for Sebastian’s hand.

“Oh, my God, this place is awesome. How did you find it?”  

They worked their way through the lounge to the table they were directed to.

“Cassie. I asked her a good place to go Salsa dancing. She might be here at some point. Is that going to be a problem?”

“Not unless she decides to critique my dancing while we’re here.”

They slid into the same side of the booth and picked up the menus.

“Don’t panic if it’s pricey. We can just order two appetizers and split them and let someone else have the table and we can go dance. That’s why I brought you here.”

“Are you sure they’re gay friendly?”

“I don’t think Cassie thought I was going to take a girl out dancing.” He kissed Kurt on his neck, right below the ear.

“I suppose not. When does the dancing start?”

“At five, but since they just opened, I figure people probably eat and then start to dance. There’s a free half-hour lesson at 7:00. It’s open until 1:00 in the morning, so more people probably come later in the evening. At least that’s what I suspect. I wanted to make sure we get a chance to dance, so we came early.”

They looked through the appetizers and made their choices.

Their server came around. “What can I get you two?”

Kurt answered, “We’ll try the duck spring rolls and the sweet potato fries.”

“Anything to drink?”

“Not tonight. It’s a school night.”

“Got it. I’ll get those appetizers right out.”

“Thanks.”

Once she left, Sebastian turned back to Kurt. “If we don’t like the food, we’ll consider the cost as our cover charge for getting in to dance. But as popular as Cassie says this place is, I bet the food is decent.”

“As long as it’s edible, it will give us energy to dance. And if it’s good, that’s just a bonus.” Kurt took his hand under the table. “Thanks for taking me out. We came back from France and our daily dynamic shifted almost cataclysmically. But you pulled me away from the abyss. I’m ready to find some middle ground. I know we can’t live like we’re on vacation all the time, but we also can’t have the endless stress we had the first three weeks we came back. I can’t thank you enough.
for stepping in and helping me see the approaching cliff.”

“I’ll do it again if I need to. I intend to keep you around for a long as I can.”

“Is that so?”

“It most certainly is.” He pecked Kurt on the lips.

“How did your progress with the ‘Kurt and Sebastian go to France for winter break’ project go with Isabelle?”

“Not as bad as it could have, but she didn’t say ‘yes’ yet.”

Their server came back with their food and put it out on the table and put two small empty plates out with them. “Can I get you two anything else?”

Sebastian said, “I just have one question. This place was recommended by an acquaintance, but I want to make sure that the two of us dancing together isn’t going to be an issue here.”

She laughed. “Sorry. No, not a problem at all. We have all sorts of people come here. You’ll see once more people start arriving. You’ll be fine. I hope you have a good time. Thanks for giving us a chance.” She headed to another table.

“These are good.” Kurt had a bite of one of the sweet potato fries in his mouth. “We’d need a deep fryer to make them. I think $8 is a reasonable price for them to peel the sweet potatoes, cut them up like French fries, and deep fry them for us. They’re definitely tasty, but they’d be a pain to prepare.”

Sebastian tried them. “They are good. Did you try that sauce? It’s good.”

Kurt tried it. “Mmm. Honey mustard. Very good and interesting with the sweet potato fries.” He bit one of the duck spring rolls in half and fed the other half to Sebastian.

“That’s good too.”

“I agree.” He dipped his next one into the sauce that came with it. “Ooh, I like that. Sweet and savory.”

They finished up their food, paid their bill, and headed out to the dance floor. People were starting to dance. While the floor was still fairly empty, Sebastian went over to the DJ and asked if he took requests. He nodded. Sebastian pulled up the song he and Kurt had been working on and showed it to him. He nodded again.

Sebastian took Kurt’s hand and they went out on the floor to dance to the song that was playing. Sebastian mostly just led Kurt through simple footwork patterns while maintaining their upper bodies more like traditional ballroom dancing. Kurt was surprised to hear “their” song start. Sebastian winked at him and charmed him with his smile into performing it together. They drew the crowd’s attention and were applauded when the song finished. They took quick bows and went back to the way they had been dancing before.

When 7:00 came around, they took the free 30-minute Salsa lesson. Since it was a lesson to dance in a confined area, it was different, but really helpful to see how to move freely, but stay in a confined space. They ended up staying until 9:00.

Once they were outside, they could hear themselves talk again. Sebastian wrapped his arm around
Kurt’s waist and Kurt did the same.

Kurt said, “That was so much fun. I had a great time. Did you like it?”

“I did. It was a lot of fun.”

“Next time I think we could come at 7:00 and stay later. I know we have work left to do tonight, but next time we can do it before we come.”

“Good plan.”

When they got out of the shower, they put the onesies on and snuggled up on the sofa to study.

Sebastian said, “I’m still a little hungry. If I make a sandwich, will you split it with me?”

“Sure.” Kurt moved a little so Sebastian could get up more easily. He kept working on the lines he was supposed to know for class the next day while Sebastian made them a toasted egg and cheese sandwich. When it was done, he got up to sit at the table with Sebastian.

“Have you heard from Elliott at all?”

“Yeah. We text back and forth sometimes. He joined a band. They’re playing some small places near where he lives, like we did when we first started out. He says he’ll let me know if they ever get a gig here in the City. He’s pretty disillusioned with the whole college thing right now. He did get a scholarship to NYU, but he still took out loans. He’s waiting tables to pay his school loans back.”

“I have to agree with him on the college thing. When I first found out how much it costs to attend college here, I thought someone was trying to yank my chain. I looked it up myself. I was dumbfounded. What kind of country enslaves the young adults most capable of learning and innovating? Going to college in France is free, well a few hundred Euros a year. I’m not saying that France doesn’t have its problems, but having its most highly educated 21 to 22 year olds facing 10 years of life-altering debt isn’t one of them. Sometimes I have to wonder whether it’s really a conspiracy of some sort to actually weaken the US. If all of the best and brightest are so indebted that they don’t buy cars, buy houses, get married, or have kids, it’s like the weirdest anti-social Darwinism eugenics program ever.”

“When you combine that with alt-right anti-women, anti-lgbt, anti-labor doctrine, it sounds like the plot of a movie where the ruling class eliminates any potential competition and only allows the lowest class to continue to have children by making contraception nearly impossible to get and abortions illegal. The ruling class always has access to whatever they need and they can have complete control over the lower class through legislation. I don’t like this movie.”

“Me neither. I saw someone in the Metro wearing a red hat that I thought was another one of those Trump hats, but instead it said ‘Make Orwell Fiction Again’. I think that’s about where we are.”

“Well, this is a depressing bedtime snack conversation.” Kurt sighed. “It’s not that much different than some of the other conversations we’ve had, but I think about all of us – me, you, Sam, Mercedes, Elliott, Adam, even Rachel. If the economy completely tanks, the middle class really will slide back and who will pay for live entertainment or original art? I know that we’ve talked about how entertainment is more than just mindlessly occupying someone’s mind, but it sort of makes me flash back to Blaine’s brother Cooper’s ridiculous advice he gave us as part of his ‘Master Acting Class’ he did for us my senior year. In addition to telling us that Broadway was
dying and that the future of acting was in Hollywood, he told us not to pay attention to our scene partner and to ask the director whether the scene is dramatic or comedic. I thought his advice was nuts. And then I look at all of the acting that’s done against green screens where the actor has absolutely no idea what or who they’re interacting with. The actor may not even know where the scene they’re filming falls in the story. That’s obviously the reality of what I’m facing when my acting class assignment for tomorrow is to memorize a group of lines that have no context and can be understood more than one way. We each were given a different set of lines to learn and we were told that we couldn’t look at each other’s pages. It’s supposed to help us get better at cold auditions where we don’t really have a feel for the character beyond a couple of brief lines of description and we only have a vague understanding of the story. Without the surrounding dialogue, I can’t work on it with anyone. I’m all on my own.”

“That stuff you said seems pretty counterproductive to getting big-name actors to giving their best performances.”

“It does to me too. If someone is going to be paid a million or more dollars to do something, I’d think it would make more sense to give them as much information as possible to make sure they were able to tap into the character and give an amazing performance. I don’t even know anymore. Thank you for the sandwich.” He got up and washed his hands. “Do you have more that you have to get done tonight?”

Sebastian dried his hands and put them on Kurt’s waist. “Nope. I’m all yours.”

Kurt wrapped his hands around the back of Sebastian’s neck and gently ran his fingers through his hair. “I had a great time tonight. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I had fun too.” He began to dance and Kurt followed his lead. He danced them to the lights and turned them off. He danced them across the room to the door to check the lock. And he danced them to their bedroom. He closed the door. He danced them into the bathroom and ended by offering Kurt his toothbrush in a bow.

Kurt laughed at him. “You’re a dork.” He took his toothbrush.

“I’m adorable. You said so before.”

“This is true. You’re an adorable dork.” He brushed his teeth and waited for Sebastian to finish. “You’re an adorable dork that I love. Never stop being dorky. It makes things interesting and fun.”

“I’ll remind you of that the first time I embarrass you in public, accidentally of course. I would never embarrass you on purpose.”

“Let’s go to bed and kiss.”

“Well, now that’s an excellent idea, but I have to go to the bathroom first.” He gently pushed Kurt out of the bathroom and closed the door.

Kurt went in the other bathroom.

“Kurt?”

“I’m coming.” In one fluid chain of actions, he came back in the room, shut the door, went around to the other side of the bed, took the onesie off, and slid under the covers. “Come snuggle me.”

Sebastian laughed and got under the covers. “And you say I am a dork.”
“I never claimed you were the ONLY dork. I think we both look pretty dorky in our fuzzy Star Trek onesies, but they’re super soft and warm and cuddly. And I’m glad that you got them for us. We look adorkable together. Kisses and then I’m the big spoon.”

Their lives took on a new rhythm after the fall play. Sebastian started going to yoga and combat training every weekday morning with Kurt. They worked on schoolwork in the NYADA library. They went their separate ways for the day after the advanced dance class. They started setting Monday nights aside to go out dancing. Tuesdays and Thursdays, Kurt made dinner since they were Sebastian’s late days at Columbia. Sebastian got his wish for stay-in-bed Saturday mornings. Sundays were still shopping, cooking, and French-speaking days.

When they got back from going out dancing the Monday before Thanksgiving, Sebastian was going over their itinerary, while they got ready to shower. Kurt approached him in just his underwear and stood close enough that he could reach out and touch Sebastian, but didn’t so he could continue to get undressed.

“Go ahead with the plan.”

“Um, I completely forgot what I was talking about. You standing there like that just wiped out every thought that isn’t about somehow touching you. Poof! Gone.”

Kurt laughed. “Do you need help undressing?” Kurt started to undo the buttons on Sebastian’s shirt.

“Definitely. The faster I get this stuff off, the sooner I can focus on putting my hands all over you.”

They finally made it into the shower.

“Can you think in here?” Kurt teased.

“I have the perfect idea of what to try with my hands on your ass, but every bit of planning vanished. I wrote it all down, so don’t worry.” He kissed Kurt passionately. “I’ve been wanting to do that for hours. The sexy dancing in public is a problem sometimes. I want you so bad.”

Kurt kissed him just as passionately. “I thought I was the only one struggling to keep it PG tonight.”

“Definitely not.”

“Well, no need for PG in here.”

When he got of from work Tuesday, Kurt picked up the car they reserved and drove it to the apartment. He packed their backpacks with the clothes they had picked out over the weekend. He put one backpack on, pulled the other, and took them down to the parking garage and loaded them into the trunk of the rental car.

He started dinner and packed the snacks they had made into a lunchbox to take with them. Once he had everything in the kitchen in order, he showered quickly, changed his clothes, and laid
clothes out for Sebastian for the drive.

Sebastian got home a little after 5:00. He showered and changed quickly. He came back out dressed to go. Before he sat down at the table, he leaned over and kissed Kurt.

“I’ve loaded everything, except our snacks.”

“Thank you. Dinner looks good.” He sat down and started to eat.

They both focused on eating since they wanted to get going. When they finished, Kurt washed the plates by hand and Sebastian dried them and put them away.

“That’s it. Ready to go?” Kurt asked.

“Just one thing.”

“What’s that?”

“A kiss from my gorgeous boyfriend.” He backed Kurt up against the counter.

Kurt wrapped his hands around Sebastian’s neck and played with his damp hair. “Always.” He kissed Sebastian and hugged him.

“Okay. I’m going to carry my coat and put it in the back. It’s not comfortable to drive and ride that far with it on.” He picked it up off the back of the chair where he’d left it when he came in. He grabbed his leather bag and stood by the door.

“Good idea.” Kurt took his out of the closet. “Adam skyped earlier. He didn’t have time to talk, but he wanted to let us know that the boxes arrived safe and sound.” Kurt grabbed his bag and the lunch bag with the snacks.

“That’s good.” He held the door open and locked it once Kurt was in the hallway.

“[ ] [ ] – [ ] [ ] – [ ] [ ]

“Oh, my God! What was that?” Sebastian said, totally panicked.

“One of the tires blew.” Kurt put his flashers on, slowed down, and pulled to the edge of the highway. Once he was safely on the edge, he carefully got out and used his phone flashlight to see which tire it was. He got back in the car.

“Can you help me move the stuff from the trunk to the backseat so I can get the spare out?”

“We get free roadside service.”

“Yes, but we’re 30 minutes from Wheeling and it’s just after midnight. It will take them an hour to get someone here. I can have us to my parents in an hour.”

“Alright.” He got out and moved the stuff.

Kurt pulled the spare out, along with the tire iron and the jack and put them next to the passenger rear tire. He put the carpet piece that covered the spare tire on the ground in front of the flat tire and got down on his knees. “Can you shine your phone flashlight this way, please?”

“Sure.”
Kurt assembled the jack and got the weight off the wheel. He got through about 2/3 of the process and Sebastian’s phone light started to flicker a bit.

“My phone is going to die.”

“Reach in my pocket and get mine.”

Sebastian pulled Kurt’s phone out and turned the flashlight on. Kurt managed to finish the task with 7% battery life.

“Do you have enough battery power to text my dad and tell him we’re running late?”

“Yeah. Do you need me to do anything else?”

“No. Text him first. We should be arriving if we hadn’t been slowed down by this.” Kurt checked the lug nuts. When he was satisfied, he lowered the car back down and packed everything back in the trunk. He put the carpet cover back and shut the trunk.

Kurt tapped on Sebastian’s window. He opened the door.

“Can you open my backpack and get one of the moist towelettes out? I can get enough of the grime off my hands to drive with one of those.”

“I can drive the rest of the way if you want.” Sebastian opened the backdoor and found what Kurt was looking for and pulled one out for him.

“I’m fine. I just need to get some of the grime off.” He took it and got to work on his hands.

“Another one?”

“Yes, please.”

Sebastian zipped Kurt’s bag back up and shut the door. “You’re amazing.” He stepped closer to Kurt and kissed him before he got back in the passenger seat.

Kurt went around and got in and pulled back out onto the highway, leaving his flashers on for long enough to see how the spare would hold up. He turned them off when he got up to 40mph and stayed there for a few minutes. “If I see any lights coming up behind us, I may pull off and put the flashers back on. It just depends. I don’t want rear-ended because someone misgauged our speed.”

“I think we might need to discuss my previously heretofore unknown mechanic fantasy that you just brought on.”

Kurt laughed. “Oh, really? Should we go into Dad’s shop tomorrow and let me show you how to use all of the equipment there?”

“Only if we’re going to be alone because I cannot promise to behave PG if you start fixing cars.”

Kurt figured out right then what he was giving Sebastian for Christmas. He just had to see if Burt had brought any of his uniforms from the shop in Lima with him when he bought the new shop. If not, he was certain that he could manage to swipe one of the beat up ones from and take it back home with him. “Well, if we go in and I fix the tire, we won’t be alone. The shop is only closed on Thanksgiving, so you’ll have to decide if seeing me fix it is worth the risk.”

“Too bad you don’t have a key, we could go tonight and I could ogle you to my heart’s content.”
“Maybe I can convince Dad to let me go in before they open, but that would be early and cut into our sleeping time.”

“I need a cold shower.”

Kurt took the exit off the highway to get to Wheeling about 15 minutes later. He pulled into the parking lot of a defunct gas station and pulled to the side where the car couldn’t be seen easily. He turned the lights off and climbed over and knelt in front of Sebastian. “I can take care of your need for a cold shower, if it’s okay with you.”

“Yes, please.”

They arrived at the Hummel’s about an hour behind schedule. Kurt asked to be shown to wherever Burt kept his hand cleansers. Carole showed him the way to laundry room off the kitchen. He started to work on thoroughly cleaning his hands while Sebastian brought in their stuff from the car.

“Rough trip there at the end.” Burt said.

Sebastian replied, “Yeah, but Kurt was on it and had it changed in no time.”

“He’s good. He always was. He has a good ear for it, like he does for music. People would bring their cars in, and from a young age he could ID a lot of their issues just from hearing them drive up. That’s one thing that’s missing in my new shop. There’s not bits and pieces of Kurt in it. The way he’d organize stuff or just how neat everything always was. Even when he was too young to work, he’d go behind the mechanics and ‘tidy everything up’ as he called it.”

“He is very organized. So am I, so that works out well.”

“I’m sure it does. I’m sure those girls drove him crazy, moving stuff, not putting things back. He hates wasting time searching for stuff.”

“Especially when he had so little time as it was. I’m sure it was really frustrating.”

“Where should I take our stuff?”

Burt showed him to their guest room. He stayed in the hallway. “Kurt’s bed and dresser are in there. His chair too.”

Sebastian put their bags on the floor next to the dresser. Carole brought Kurt to the bedroom. “We’ll let you two get some sleep.”

Burt said, “We’ll deal with the car in the morning. I’m just glad you could get it fixed to get here.”

Kurt teased, “I haven’t forgotten how to use a tire iron.”

“Good thing.”

Carole said, “Good night, you two.”

“‘Night,” Kurt said. He closed and locked the door. He looked around the room. “This is kind of weird. My old stuff is here, but in a room I’ve never see before. Does this room have its own bathroom?”
“I didn’t get a chance to look around.” He opened the door closest to the dresser, which was a closet.

Kurt opened the door behind the door that came in from the hallway. “You can get in from the hallway too. We’ll just have to lock this door to the hallway and the one from the bathroom to the hallway. I cleaned my hands, but I still feel grimy. I’m going to shower again. You can join me if you’d like.”

“That’s not an offer I’m going to turn down.”

Kurt stepped into the bathroom and locked the door to the hallway. He came back into the room and locked the door from the hallway to the bedroom. They got their toiletries out and headed into the bathroom. They showered in silence, put pajama pants and t-shirts on, and brushed their teeth.

“I feel better, even though it’s super late.” He hung up the two outfits he’d planned to wear while there.

Sebastian followed his lead and did the same.

Once they were done, Kurt looked for an outlet and plugged his phone in to charge. Sebastian plugged his cable into the charger as well and connected his phone. Kurt waited for Sebastian to get in bed, and then he turned the light off and got in bed with him.

Kurt spoke quietly. “I’m taking this shirt off.” He pulled it off and put it at the end of the bed. He felt Sebastian put his down there as well. He waited for Sebastian to lie back, and then he scooted closer and put his head on Sebastian’s chest. “Much better.” Kurt snuggled up, but couldn’t seem to get comfortable.

Sebastian kissed the top of his head and ran his hand down his arm. “Hey, what’s bothering you? You’re really tense.”

“It’s just super hard. It would have been easier if they had just sold my stuff too and put different furniture in here. Trying to make it feel like it did just brings back memories that are hard to come to terms with. It’s like being caught between being awakened from dream and waking up all the way when your surroundings mix together. Nothing’s right, but nothing’s wrong. This is my bed. There was no need to replace it, yet it feels out of place here because this isn’t where I see it when I think of it.”

“That’s how I felt at Grandmère’s last December. Right stuff, wrong place, and things missing.”

“Yeah. And people missing.”

“That too.”

“I’m glad you’re here with me. I’m also really glad that you got to spend so long in Paris this summer getting reacquainted with everyone and finding your place in your family again.”

“Me too. And I’m glad you were with me there. And you will be again when we go back in December.”

“You convinced Isabelle finally?”

“I did. Grandma bought the tickets Friday. I was waiting to surprise you.”

Kurt scooted up in the bed and kissed Sebastian. “I can’t believe you got her to agree to it.”
“I can be very persuasive.”

“Mmm hmm.” Kurt kissed him. “So details, please. When are we leaving?”

“Well, I knew you wanted to come here for a few days, so we’re doing that and then taking an overnight flight out late Christmas night. Grandma is thinking of having her driver bring her here for dinner. And we’ll go back with her to Columbus. Unless your parents don’t want to host her for dinner, in which case we can work something else out.”

“We’ll talk to them tomorrow. So, we’re leaving Christmas night and then staying how long?”

“The rest of winter break. We’re coming back the 17th.”

“That’s three weeks.”

“It is.”

“I’m so excited.”

“Which is why I was going to tell you tomorrow.”

“Tell me a story.” Kurt snuggled back down and wrapped himself around Sebastian.

“Once upon a time…”

“So, here’s your options. You can return the car as-is and you’ll likely get charged a small fortune for the tire. More than retail, plus some kind of fee for the car being out-of-service for the day since they’ll have to have a new tire put on it. Or you can take it down to the shop before it opens, put a new tire on it yourself and just cover the actual cost of the tire, which is about $45.”

“Well, the obvious choice is to take it down and put a new tire on it myself. If you give me your keys and the address, I’ll take Sebastian with me and we’ll be back in time for breakfast.”

“Nope. I’m going with you to show you around the shop and then Carole’s meeting us at the car rental drop off and we’re going out for breakfast.

“Okay. Let me go get Sebastian.” Kurt knocked lightly and waited a few seconds to open the door. He stepped in. Sebastian was tying his shoes. “I’m going to go fix the tire, but don’t get too excited. Dad’s coming too. After I fix it, we’re returning the car and Carole’s meeting us to go out to breakfast.” He hugged and kissed him. “I’m sorry we can’t play out your mechanic fantasy.”

Sebastian kissed him again. “Your dad probably has security cameras in there anyway.” He kissed along his jaw line to his ear. “I love you.”

Kurt forced himself back to the reality of his dad waiting for them. “I love you too. We need to get going. Dad’s waiting on us.”

After Burt showed them around, Kurt slipped some coveralls on and got busy on the tire. Sebastian found a stool and sat down out of the way to watch him. Unbeknownst to him, Burt was watching him from across the bay while appearing to be working on something. After a few minutes, Burt quit watching him and walked up behind him.
“You’ve got it bad,” Burt said.

“I know.”

Burt laughed. “Good. He deserves to have someone head over heels about him.”

“I agree.”

“Does he know you love him?”

“He does. I tell him every day, more than once.”

Kurt looked up from what he was doing. Sebastian winked at him and Kurt’s face lit up.

“You know, I hadn’t seen him smile like that in so long, I had forgotten what he looked like when he was truly happy. When we came for his birthday, it was obvious that he was happier than he had been in as long as I could remember and now he looks like the cat that gets cream for breakfast every day.”

Sebastian laughed at that.

“When I asked him how he knew you had changed, he said that you hadn’t. I didn’t get it. He said that the version of you that he met in high school wasn’t the real you. And that you hadn’t changed – you had just healed and returned to who you had always been. He said it wasn’t his story to tell, but that I should just take his word for the fact that you were like a beloved family dog that got his foot caught in a ‘possum trap and eventually managed to get it out, but it wasn’t until you got to New York that Isabelle took you to someone to get you fixed up.”

“That’s pretty accurate analogy. I appreciate that he kept my story to himself. You know a little of the end of the story – me being disowned for being gay.”

“Yes.”

“When my parents got divorced when I was 8, my mother got full custody. I went to France with her. I never came here for visitation or anything. He somehow got it into the custody agreement that I would be returned to him if she died before I turned 18.”

“Oh, God.”

“Yeah. She was killed in a pedestrian/car accident a few weeks before my 18th birthday. I begged and pleaded. He had the legal power and he won. I was brought here. I knew no one, not even him. He had remarried. My stepmother does not like or want kids. His goal was to set me on the straight and narrow. The rest involves me being a really angry teenager, who had just lost his mother and found out that instead of finishing high school that year, I’d have to spend two years at Dalton due to differences in educational systems.”

“So, you lashed out.”

“I did. And if there was one thing I could change about my behavior, something that I had control over, it would be that. The day I met him, I would have told him about the accident. He of all people KNEW what it was like to lose a mother who loved him. Anyway, he forgave me for the way I acted.”

“He’s a very forgiving person.”
“I know and I don’t intend to abuse that at all. I swear.”

“I hope not. I thought I was a good judge of character, but I let that little punk con me. But Kurt’s different around you – in a good way. He’s about done.”

Kurt lowered the lift. He cleaned his hands up and backed the car out and put it out in the lot.

Burt said, “I’m glad he’s happy and that you are too. That punk leaving him alone?”

“Mostly.”

“I’d have preferred ‘yes’ as the answer.”

“You and me both.”

Burt lowered the bay door after Kurt came back in.

“I’m just going to change back. I’ll be right out.” Kurt folded the coveralls up and took them out to the car with him.

Burt was still in his office checking on something. Sebastian came out with him. Burt locked up and set the alarm. Burt texted Carole as they pulled out of the lot.

Burt and Kurt went into the car rental store together. Sebastian moved to the backseat of Carole’s car.

“I have a nosy question, which you can choose to not answer. I’ve heard you call him something in French. I’m assuming it’s something like ‘babe’ or ‘honey’?”

“Are you asking me if it’s a pet name like that or what it actually means?”

“What it means.”

“It means ‘my fire’.”

“I don’t get it. Is it a common French expression?”

“No, I chose it. He just has this fire inside him. You can see it in his eyes, but everything that happened nearly put his fire out. He had gotten really close to giving up and being whatever everyone else wanted. But once he was back in New York, he came back to life the longer he was away from everyone from Lima, not you or Burt or Sam, but everyone else.”

“What does he call you?”

“‘Mon abri’ – it means my shelter or hearth or refuge depending on the context. He chose it because being with me isn’t like it was with them. I don’t try to put his fire out or use it for my own gain. And I protect his fire from other people who might try to put it out.”

“That’s really sweet but sad about the way the people we thought were his friends treated him.”

“It is. But he readily admits that he kept things from the two of you to protect you. He had been told for so long that he brought it on himself that even when he knew he didn’t, it didn’t change how he felt about it.”
“Knowledge and feelings don’t always match. I get that. I really do.”

“And he realizes now that it was type of lying. So, he had a lot to work through. I know he told you that it wasn’t until the night of his birthday this year that he realized that people weren’t just putting up with him – tolerating him. He really felt like his skills offset his personality just enough for people to tolerate him. It’s all he was used to. That’s what I was referring to about people using his fire for their gain. He was always willing to put other people first and use his talents to help other people succeed, and the people in his life took advantage of that. He was shocked that my whole huge crazy family accepted him. They love him. He said being with them is what he had always imagined having a family would be like – craziness, acceptance, and love.”

“I’m glad for him. Blaine’s family wasn’t like that. I mean I met his mother the day of Brittany and Santana’s wedding.”

“He still can’t figure out why on earth she had been invited or why she went. She didn’t know them.”

“That was the weirdest day. And looking back on it afterwards, it only got more weird.”

“I’ll take your word for it. He hasn’t gone into detail about what happened that day. I think he wants to forget it. If he ever wants to tell me, he can, but I won’t bring it up.”

“Looking back, someone had a hand in it. I don’t know who, but there’s no way that whole thing was a spontaneous ‘get married with us’ idea that Brittany had. She’s a sweet girl and she may be a math genius, but the kind of detail that went into it screams Sue Sylvester to me. But I have no earthly idea why it would be of any interest to her.”

“I don’t know either. The only idea that comes to mind is absolutely insane.”

“What?”

“That Blaine offered her an enormous amount of money to help him get Kurt back. That all of that crazy stuff she did was at his request.”

“They say money talks, but that’s really insane, but there is no logical or sane answer. Your crazy hypothesis at least makes everything else make sense.”

“I’m not sure if he ever told you, but this isn’t secret information or anything. Dave Karofsky and Blaine had been in a relationship for several months. They were living together in a 1-bedroom place as a serious couple. Blaine cheated on him by kissing Kurt. He broke it off with Dave and moved out during the week that preceded the barn wedding.”

“If Kurt told us that, I missed it or it got forgotten along with who knows what else due to being in shock from everything else he told us when he came to DC. God, Kurt was messed up. Going back to someone whose bed with another man was barely cold. There is no way that Burt knew that or he would have put his foot down when Kurt and Blaine came up the aisle. He would have told them to take their places with the attendants and that he’d talk to them afterwards. He would not have been willing to marry them.”

“He hasn’t told me a whole lot about it. Sam told me a lot more about it – not Kurt’s story because he and Kurt were still estranged. Sam didn’t know anything about Kurt’s part in all of it other than what he observed. Everything revolved around Rachel and Blaine. Kurt was their support. Rachel apologized this summer. I’m not sure for what all exactly, but Kurt has declared a personal truce with her. He’s moved past being angry, but he’s not willing to let her back into his life. After his
birthday, he went to Blaine’s. Sam and I went with him. He asked Blaine to leave him alone for
the third time. He told him in no uncertain terms that they were never getting back together.
Blaine has mostly complied with Kurt’s request. It’s better than it was after the second request.”

“I wasn’t there for him. After Finn died, I fell apart. He was still my world. I hadn’t moved to the
part of my life where I was the parent of an adult. Finn needed me and I always felt like Kurt
didn’t. I just didn’t know that Kurt needed me just as much as Finn did. He was just so used to
doing without a mother and he seemed so self-sufficient and mature. And he was, but I was wrong
to think that meant that he didn’t need me. He didn’t need me to tell him how to wash his clothes
or how to cook or how to behave like an adult. He already knew all of those things before I met
him when he was 16. But he still needed me.”

“He understands that.”

“I know he does, but it doesn’t absolve me of the responsibility I had to be a parent to Kurt. Burt
stepped right up and assumed the role of parent with Finn so easily. And I should have put more
effort into getting to know Kurt. He and I got along easily as well. We cooked together. He taught
me more about keeping a home than my own mother did. He had reasons for everything. His
skills and knowledge were based on solid research. That’s what he had available – books and
videos. But those resources didn’t build him up when he was down. They didn’t teach him that he
was loved for who he was. I had two years to instill that in him and I didn’t. And when his life fell
apart after Blaine cheated on him, he didn’t even tell me or Burt. If that’s not telling, I don’t know
what is. He thought we’d side with Blaine like everyone else had. What kind of friends side with
the cheater instead of the one that was cheated on?”

“People who aren’t really your friends. They’re coming out finally.”

She looked up.

“He doesn’t hold anything you’ve said against you. All I can say is that you need to accept his
forgiveness and move on. That’s what I did. I know it sounds easy, but it isn’t. It’s what he wants
though. He doesn’t want you to continue to beat yourself up. That just ruins the here-and-now. It
taints every interaction. Sam is the one who taught me this on a personal level. Of course my
therapist told me, but Sam lived it. If you don’t stop acting sorry and upset with yourself, every
interaction with Kurt is tainted by him being reminded that you haven’t forgiven yourself and
you’re still stuck in the past. Just be the parent you want to be now. Practice it every time you talk
to him. New behaviors have to be practiced to become habit.”

Burt opened the door.

Carole nodded.

Kurt opened the back door and slide across the seat to sit next to Sebastian. “If we had taped that
interaction, I’m sure that I could have created a skit along the lines of ‘Who’s on First?’ or a Three
Stooges episode. The visual dictionary should have the video of our interaction filed under
incompetence.”

Burt shook his head. “We’ve missed breakfast at this point. How about Greek? Or Chinese?”

“The Greek place is good. The Chinese place has good food and it’s a buffet.”

Kurt said, “Chinese sounds good.”

“Chinese it is,” Burt said, backing out of the spot.
They spent the early afternoon sitting around in the living room talking about school, the shop, and Carole’s new job. That afternoon, Burt spent some time watching TV while Carole, Kurt, and Sebastian prepped some dishes for the next day. Carole did her best to take Sebastian’s encouragement to heart and stopped acting penitent. She relaxed and they laughed and teased while they cooked. She managed to get Kurt and Sebastian to sing for her.

“So what do you do in your free time?” she asked.

“Do you really want to know?” Kurt teased her and wiggled his eyebrows.

“Kurt!”

“Come on Bas. Let’s show her.” Kurt winked at Sebastian. He took his phone out and put it on the kitchen counter. “You’ll have to stand over that way.” Kurt pointed to a space at the end of the counter. Kurt turned the volume up a little and pressed play. He moved into position and the two of them did the Salsa dance they worked on first.

Burt heard the music and got up to go see what was going on. He ended up standing behind Carole. He put his hand on her waist and watched. When they finished, Burt said, “Well, that was something. I mean I knew you said that Sebastian was working with your dance teacher, but I never really thought about it. You two are really good.”

Kurt smiled. He grabbed his phone and put it in his pocket. “Carole asked us what we do in our free time, so we showed her – and you. Cassie, my dance teacher, recommended a place to Bas and we go there on Monday nights and dance. It’s a lot of fun. If you’re ever in town on a Monday, you two can come with us.”

“I can’t dance like that,” Carole said.

“You don’t have to, but they have a free half-hour lesson each week for people who want to learn the basics. And you can watch. That’s fun too.”

“We’ll go with you if were ever there on a Monday. I’ll mostly watch though. You know I’m not much of a dancer, but I’ll do the free lesson.” He went back to the living room.

The other three went back to prepping food. Once they finished the Thanksgiving dishes, they made dinner. They sat down to eat together and afterwards, they watched Mr. Holmes, which Carole had picked up that morning on the way to meet them.

The next day they slept in a little and had a nice breakfast before they packed everything up and drove to Carole’s sister’s place in Zanesville. Kurt had never been before, but Kurt had heard Finn tell stories of his aunt drinking too much eggnog and blacking out. He didn’t really know what to expect, but Carole was very excited about them going, so he went along with her cheerfulness.

They arrived a little before noon. Kurt and Sebastian helped carry things in from the car. Once everything was in, Carole started introducing them to her relatives. Things seemed to be going along fine until one of her uncles questioned who Sebastian was.

“Is he a friend of yours from school, young man?”

“Sebastian is my boyfriend.”
“Ah. I see.”

Within 15 minutes, the atmosphere had changed. Kurt saw the dish that Carole had bragged about Kurt making get moved to the laundry room. Only a couple of people were still interacting with them. The majority were being obviously polite instead of welcoming.

Kurt retrieved their coats and texted Sebastian to come out the front door. “Can you get Grandma Smythe to send a car out to get us?”

“Yes. I’ll call her. It will take an hour though.”

“That’s fine. Let me look something up first.” Kurt opened the map app on his phone. “Tell her to have the driver pick us up at this place.” He showed Sebastian the name of the place on his phone. “I’m 99% sure that it’s closed, but it should be easy to find since it’s right along the highway.”

Sebastian texted her. While he was doing that, Kurt opened the trunk and moved the bag of snacks into his backpack. He pulled both backpacks out and stood them up next to the trunk.

“Someone’s on their way.” He walked over and grabbed his bag and popped the handle up. “Lead the way.”

Kurt popped the handle up on his bag as well. They walked to the end of the block and walked a block to the west before Kurt stopped to text Burt.

--We’ve left early. A car is coming to pick us up. I don’t want to interrupt Carole’s afternoon with her family.

They continued to walk toward the small grocery store. About 10 minutes later, Burt called. Kurt pulled his phone out of his pocket and answered it.

“Hey, kiddo. Sorry, I had my phone set to silent. I saw your text when I pulled it out to text your when I couldn’t find you. Where are you?”

“About 10 minutes from the house. I didn’t want to stand around at the house, so we’re walking into town to the pick up point I designated.”

“I’m not sure what went on that made you leave, but Carole’s outside here with me crying.”

“Please tell her that we’re not upset with her. She has no control over what her relatives think. I’m just not going to subject myself to it anymore. If people I meet want to decide that I’m not worth getting to know, then so be it. I’ll move on. I’ve learned that there are people who will take the chance to get to know me and who like me. I don’t have to tone down who I am or act like Bas is just my best friend and I’m straight. I’m not that kid anymore. I know that I’m loved and that’s enough. I don’t need faked friendliness. But I’m sorry that Carole’s upset. Is she actually upset that I didn’t try harder or is she upset about the way they were behaving?”

“About them, not you. She loves you, Kurt.”

“I know. Tell her I love her too, but I can’t do that to myself anymore. We can talk more later.”

The store had some benches out front, which Kurt was glad for because he didn’t really want to stand up for another 20 minutes and he didn’t want to sit on the ground either.
“We may want to rethink Christmas,” Kurt said.

“That’s fine. We can maybe spend Christmas Eve with them, and then go to Grandma’s on Christmas Day and if she’s have a big family event, we can just stay in one of the bedrooms and enjoy the day together. I really want to hold your hand right now, but given the quick change of atmosphere in that house when they realized we’re gay, I’ll just wait until we get in the car to do it. No need to invite trouble. We could probably be arrested for trespassing by sitting on these benches. Small town laws and rules aren’t always equally enforced.”

“Trust me. I know.” He pulled his phone back out and called Sam to do something cheerful.

Sam passed his phone around and Kurt and Sebastian talked to Stevie and Stacey for a few minutes. When they hung up, Kurt called Elliott and Mercedes and he and Sebastian wished them both a happy Thanksgiving without saying anything about what had happened.

By the time they got to Grandma Smythe’s, it was 2:30 and her annual dinner was already in progress. The driver let them out at the service entrance because Sebastian asked him to.

Kurt followed Sebastian into the kitchen where he prepared two plates of food for them. He put the handle down and put his bag on like a backpack, picked up their plates and had Kurt follow him. He went up the back stairs and let himself into one of the guest rooms. He looked around and didn’t find anything in the room. Kurt followed him in. Sebastian put the food down and shut and locked the door.

Sebastian let Grandma Smythe know that they had arrived and were eating by themselves. Sebastian moved the small writing table near the window so that it was next to the bed. He carried the chair over next and sat down. Kurt put the plates on the table and sat on the bed.

“So now what?” Kurt asked.

“How about we just stay up here and enjoy our unexpected free time.”

“Alright.”

“Did you bring the massage oil?”

Kurt shook his head. “I have my lotion. We could just do regular massages.”

“Sure.”

They finished eating and Kurt got up to go wash his hands. Kurt stepped into the bathroom. “Are you sure this isn’t Grandma Smythe’s room.”

Sebastian opened both closet doors and then the dresser drawers. “Unless she keeps ALL of her clothing in some other room, this is not her room.”

“Ohay. Just checking. I know what we’re doing.”

“What?”

“Come in here.”

“Ooh, a garden tub. Excellent.” Sebastian went back out to the bedroom, moved the table and chair back, closed the curtains, and started to undress. He laid his clothes over the sitting chair and
folded the covers on the bed back. He went back into the bathroom in just his boxer briefs. “All ready.”

Kurt had already started the water and gotten undressed. “Let’s take a shower first and take the edge off so we can enjoy the bath for longer.”

They lay in the bed talking for the rest of the afternoon. Once everyone had left, Grandma called. They got dressed, grabbed their dishes, and dropped them off in the kitchen. They met her in the library and found her sitting at a table with a stack board games so old, they had to have been Sebastian’s grandfather’s games.

“Choose one,” she said as they sat down.

Sebastian pulled Scrabble out of the stack. They set the game up and played it and quite a few of the other ones as the afternoon turned to evening. Isabelle returned from spending the afternoon at her parents’ place around 7:00. Sebastian and Kurt made them all plates of food and they ate together before returning to the library for more board games.

“I’m out,” Isabelle said. “Grandma, you’re heartless. You have all the money.”

“Don’t whine Isabelle. It’s unbecoming,” she teased.

“Let’s play poker,” Isabelle said.

“Not if we’re playing for real money,” Kurt said. “I bet Grandma is a card shark too.”

“We’ll play for secrets,” she said.

“Hmm,” Kurt said. “Fine. But only one secret per losing hand.”

“Grandma Smythe is a hoot,” Kurt said once they were snuggled up in bed together.

“She is definitely a lot more bawdy than I had thought. Perhaps we should get her a set of Cards Against Humanity. She might get a big kick out of it.”

“That’s a funny idea. I think we should do it. She’s the one that made it super obvious exactly how far away her room and Isabelle’s room were from the room we chose.”

“I had a hard time keeping a straight face.”

“Acting skills come in handy,” Kurt teased.

“She caught me off-guard too. That didn’t help.”

Kurt ran his hand through Sebastian’s hair. “I love you. And I’m glad we’re together even though this trip hasn’t gone like we’d planned.”

“Me too to about being with you, and I love you too.” He kissed Kurt. “But I think we’ll spend next Thanksgiving at home. We’ll cook and pig out and play games. Or maybe Grandma will finally give up her traditional dinner and come stay with us and Isabelle can come too. We can cook for the four of us.”
Kurt scooted forward and kissed him. “That sounds like fun.” He kissed Sebastian again, this time with more passion with the realization that Sebastian still saw them together in a year.

“We should have stopped and gotten something for dinner,” Sebastian said as he opened the apartment door.

“How about Surprise à la Kurt?”

“I’ll eat anything you cook for me. I’ll go unpack our suitcases while you use you imagination to conjure up something to eat from the slim pickings in our kitchen.” Sebastian kissed him and took their bags to their room. He grabbed their laundry basket from the closet and opened their bags to sort the laundry.

About the time that Sebastian found it, Kurt remembered what he was hiding at the bottom of his bag. He hurried down to the bedroom, but saw that he was too late when Sebastian had the coveralls in his hands.

“Um, I guess you found the surprise already.”

“I guess I did,” he said with a huge smile on his face. “I think I’ll wash this first.” He slipped past Kurt and tossed it in the washer and turned it on.
“This is delicious, by the way.” Sebastian took another bite of the omelette that Kurt had made and split between them.

“Thank you.” Kurt finished his half quickly and got up to put his plate in the dishwasher. He washed the skillet and cutting board too. Once they were clean he grabbed a towel to dry them.

Sebastian put his plate in the dishwasher and reached for the towel as well, managing to grab hold of the other end. He tugged playfully, but when he looked up he caught Kurt quickly wiping tears from his eyes. Sebastian let go of the towel.

“Did I hurt you somehow? It was just to be silly. I was going to pretend tug-of-war you for the towel to dry the dishes.”

Kurt shook his head. He went ahead and dried them himself and put them away. He heard the washer beep and he went down the hall to toss the coveralls into the dryer. He went in their room, carrying the onesies that had been in the dryer, and continued with the laundry sorting that Sebastian had started after he hooked the onesies on the over-the-door hook they had gotten to keep them on.

Sebastian followed him and sorted with him. He stayed nearby without pressuring Kurt. He buttoned the shirts and turned them inside out the way Kurt did. He put the ones that needed some pre-treating on the collar in a stack. He took the stack he had to the laundry closet and started on the collars and tossed them in after he did each one. He went back for the rest of the shirts and tossed them in and started the load. He went back into the bedroom where Kurt was still examining the pants for stains since riding the subway frequently meant stains.

“It’s not you. I promise. You didn’t do anything.”

“Okay. Even if I didn’t to anything, I’m still here for you. I’ll listen if you want to talk. And if you just want a hug or a snuggle, I’m here for that too. And if you’d rather be distracted, I’m pretty good at that.” He did a Michael Jackson spin and started to sort of break dance with a moonwalk thrown in.

The way you make me feel  
You really turn me on  
You knock me off my feet  
My lonely days are gone

He took Kurt’s hands and kept singing, but changed the song. He started dancing around Kurt and with him, keeping it all light-hearted and Michael Jackson-esque.

Boy, close your eyes  
Let that rhythm get into you  
Don’t try to fight  
There ain’t nothing that you can do

Relax your mind  
Lay back and groove with mine  
You gotta feel that heat  
And we can ride the boogie
Share that heat of love

I want to rock with you – all night
Dance out into day – sunlight
I want to rock with you – all night
Rock the night away

He pulled him close and started to move them in some of the Salsa moves they’d be done, but to the beat of the song that he changed to.

You rocked my world, you know you did
And everything I own I give
The rarest love who’d think I’d find
Someone like you to call mine
In time I knew that love would bring
This happiness to me
I tried to keep my sanity
I waited patiently
Boy, you know it seems
My life is so complete
A love that’s true because of you
Keep doing what you do

Sebastian didn’t continue with the song because Kurt was just holding onto him and not dancing anymore. He wrapped his arms around Kurt and held him close. He ran his hand soothingly up and down Kurt’s back. “I’m here.” He could feel Kurt nod, but he also could feel Kurt’s tears falling. He repositioned himself so that he could pick Kurt up bridal style. He carried him the few steps to the bed and sat him down. He sat down next to him. “I’m just making things worse. I’m sorry.” He took Kurt’s hand and interlaced their fingers. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” Kurt said quietly. “You’re not making it worse.”

Sebastian grabbed the pants and moved them to the stool for the keyboard. He lay down in the bed. “Scoot up and snuggle me.”

Kurt moved up in the bed and lay his head on Sebastian’s chest and let Sebastian hold him.

“If you want to talk about it, you can. If not, I’ll just hold you.”

“I washed the skillet and sat it in the drain, and then I washed the cutting board and the day before Thanksgiving popped into my head where I was washing the cutting board while you and Carole were still working on stuff.” He didn’t say anything else for a few minutes. “And we were having a good time. She had stopped acting like she had something to apologize for and she was just teasing and talking and it was fun. It was like it had been when I spent time with her before. And then the next day we left the house, all cheerful, to go her sister’s. And that all changed in an instant. I said you were my boyfriend and suddenly the world tilted on its axis and dumped her family’s brains out their ears or something.”

Sebastian chuckled.

“And I grabbed our coats and called you outside. I grabbed our bags and we left. We left Carole crying outside her sister’s house. I was so upset at the time that all I could think about was myself and how I wasn’t going to put up with it. But we didn’t even say goodbye to them. She’s been through enough. She didn’t need me to dump my damage in her lap too. I know she was crying
because of what they were doing to me, to us – but I should have told Dad where we were going to meet the driver. He could have at least brought Carole with him and we could have said a proper goodbye. What I did was really insensitive.”

“I doubt that she’s upset with you.”

“That my very well be true, but it doesn’t change the fact that I handled a bad situation badly. Yes, I had the right to walk away and not be treated badly because of my sexual orientation, but I didn’t need to be so childish about it. I need to call them. Plus, we were going to discuss the Christmas plans while they were driving us to Columbus later that day.”

“That’s true.”

“I didn’t give her a chance to choose us. Not that she needed to make a choice, but I took the choice away from her.” He didn’t saying anything for a couple of minutes. “It’s still there.”

“What’s still there?” Sebastian gave him time to compose his thoughts.

“Even after all this time, my knee-jerk reaction is to assume that I won’t be the one that is chosen. Whether she would have chosen us or them, isn’t relevant. I took her choice away and walked away ASSUMING that she would choose them.”

“Deep-seated responses like that don’t just go away. You realizing that you’re still responding that way is the first step to changing what’s become an automatic response. But I want you to think about the positive thing that I saw happen that day.”

“What’s that?”

“On the phone when you were talking to your dad, you said, ‘I know I’m loved and that’s enough.’ I was so thrilled and amazed to hear you say that not only because I’m one of the people who loves you, but because that, combined with you saying something about knowing that there are people who will take a chance to get to know you and will like you and that you don’t have to stick around where you’re not wanted – that let me know that you have finally accepted that you are not the problem. You are not why other people are jackasses. People are jackasses all on their own. I should know. I’ve been one before. But I was thrilled to hear you declare that you’ve stopped internalizing other people’s issues. I honestly think Carole cares more about that than the fact than you think she does. Let’s call them and talk. You’ve already beat yourself up over something you don’t even know for sure is a problem.” He tipped Kurt’s chin up. “Can I kiss you?”

Kurt closed the distance and kissed him, and then he got up to get his phone. Sebastian followed him and moved the ottoman to the corner of the sectional, sat down, stretched his legs out, and made room for Kurt to sit between his legs. Kurt sat down and relaxed back into him. Sebastian wrapped his arms around Kurt and kissed him right above the ear and squeezed him gently.

“Hey, kiddo. It’s good to hear from you.”

“Hey, Dad. Is Carole around?”

“Yeah. I’ll get her.” He moved the phone away from his mouth and called out for her. “She’s coming.”

She plopped down next to him on the sofa.
“Kurt and Sebastian called.”

She said, “Hi, guys. Did you make it back to New York?”

“Yes,” Kurt said. “Sebastian’s grandma insisted on buying us plane tickets that were still available on Isabelle’s flight back. She said that one flat tire and 8 hours of driving was enough for one trip.”

“Well, good,” she said. “I’m glad you made it back safe. You sound like you’ve been crying. Are you okay?”

“I called to apologize.”

“For what, honey?”

“For leaving the house in a huff in Zanesville. I should have come up with a way to tell you two goodbye. I feel really bad for just stomping off. I’m sorry.”

“Oh, honey. I’m not upset with you. I was upset with them. They were so rude. Their behavior was completely uncalled for.”

“You obviously hadn’t told them I’m gay.”

“I hadn’t specifically, no. Do you know why, Kurt?”

“You didn’t want them to know?”

“That’s not it at all. At all. When I think about you, the word ‘gay’ isn’t what comes to mind.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re not my ‘gay’ son or worse yet ‘Burt’s gay son’. You’re Kurt. You’re kind and sweet. You’re a good cook. You’re funny. You’re good tailor. You’re helpful. You sing beautifully. You’re a lot of things and you’re good at a lot of things. But gay isn’t something that I think about when I think about you. You’re gay. I’m straight. It’s not that I don’t care because I do care. It’s that you being gay doesn’t change anything about how I think about you otherwise. You being gay doesn’t make me want or not want to bake with you. The fact that you enjoy baking makes me want to do it with you. I know that being gay has affected your life in ways that I can never fully understand. But you being gay doesn’t affect how I see you or whether I love you. The only personal way my life will be affected by you being gay is that one day I might have a son-in-law instead of a daughter-in-law. Sebastian’s with you, right?”

“He is.”

“When I see him look at you, that’s the look that all parents want their child to have from the child’s partner. And when you look at him – that joy in your eyes – I had never seen it before. I didn’t know that what I saw before wasn’t what you looked like when you were truly happy. When we came to your birthday party and we talked over the course of those couple of days, I saw a side of you I had never seen before. If I had known that’s how you were, I would have seen that how you were before wasn’t okay. I would have been able to see that you weren’t really happy. I accepted that what I saw was how you were. I didn’t really get to know you. That was my own fault. I’m disappointed in myself that I just let myself believe that since you were so mature that you didn’t need me. We got along easily and I just left it there. We did things together, but I didn’t work on getting to know you. And I’m sorry for that.”
Burt said, “I spent a lot of time thinking about that after our talks last fall. I remembered that time I got a call at the shop and you let Rachel win that singing thing so that you wouldn’t cause me any more problems. I should have realized then that you were dealing with a lot more than you were letting on. You blew the call off like it was nothing, but you were really upset by how much it had affected me. I’m sorry that I knew you were gay and I didn’t do anything to make it easier on you. I made you wonder whether I would still love you. I hate the fact that I still had any residual homophobia left in me by the time you were old enough to want to talk about it and that you couldn’t feel secure that I would be there for you. Instead, you took all of the crap that was happening and kept it from me. I look back at my actions and I can see why. I mean I told you to be safe with Brittany and walked up stairs and left the two of you alone after you had just basically told me that you were going to have sex with her. And then when I saw Blaine in your bed fully clothed and hung over, I got really upset.”

“You did what?” Carole asked in disbelief.

“It’s true. He told me he was gay, plus I already knew, and then like 6 months later, he had Brittany down in his room and they were kissing and I walked in on them.”

“After I had specifically left a note on my door saying to stay out…”

“That’s true. Anyway, I walked in on them and before I left, I told them to use protection.”

Carole said, “What?”

“Look, I didn’t think he would do it. He’s gay.”

“Burt Hummel, lots of gay men have sex with women.”

“Anyway… back what I was saying, I realized how I had screwed up. I made him feel like having sex with girls would be fine, but having sex with boys-“

Kurt interrupted him, “-was inappropriate. This conversation has gone way off track. I called to apologize to Carole for walking off and not saying a proper goodbye. I should have been more level-headed and told you I was leaving. I didn’t want to put you in the position of needing to feel like you had to choose between your family and me, so I left.”

“Kurt, honey, you’re my family too.”

“I know, but-”

“Let me finish,” she said emphatically. “We looked forward to you coming for ages. I had a lot of fun cooking with the two of you the day before. We wanted to eat Thanksgiving dinner with the two of you. I can go see my sister whenever I want. And honestly, right now, I don’t even want to see a lot of the people that were there. But if I decide that I do, they mostly all live within an hour of here. You drove nearly 8 hours and I was so mad at them.”

Burt said, “She went in and let them have it. Something along the lines of ‘I already lost one son and your ignorance just chased off my other one.’ There was a lot of arguing and we ended up leaving about an hour later, right before they sat down to eat. She grabbed our dishes and we brought them home with us. She made us some chicken and baked potatoes and it was a nice meal, but not the one we wanted to have with you.”

Carole added, “I should have realized that some of them would have the same small-town bigotry problems that people in Lima have. I’m sorry that I took you into a situation where you were blindsided by their ignorance. I was glad you didn’t put up with it.”
“So, I’m sorry and you’re sorry, and it’s a big sorry mess. The question is where do we go from here? We were going to come for Christmas.”

“Were?” Carole asked.

“Are. I’m just not interested in a repeat of Thanksgiving and I don’t want you to miss out on doing things with the rest of your family.”

“Let me deal with them,” Carole said.

Sebastian spoke up. “Grandma was hoping to have dinner with the two of you on Christmas Eve. We’re not sure how to set that up. She can have a driver bring her out and then we can ride back with her to Columbus at the end of the evening or we can drive to Columbus together and the two of you can either spend the night at her place and drive back Christmas morning or you can drive back home Christmas Eve in the evening.”

Carole asked, “And you two are coming the day before Christmas Eve, right?”

Sebastian answered, “Yes, in the morning. Our flight lands around 9:00.”

Carole said, “How about we’ll drive the four of us to Columbus to her place? We can have fun cooking and baking and take some things with us. We can arrive at dusk so we don’t have to drive in the dark. We can get up the next morning and drive back. My family is currently planning get together for Christmas Day lunch, so we can just go to Zanesville from Columbus.”

“Alright,” Sebastian said. “I’ll let Grandma know.”

“Maybe you can find out some of her favorites and we can make a couple that afternoon.”

“I’ll do that.”

“Kurt, honey?”

“Yeah?”

“If you were crying before you called because you thought that you upset me by leaving, I’m not upset with you.”

“I wasn’t upset that I had left. I was actually crying because I felt bad about leaving without saying goodbye properly. That combined with something else that I was upset with myself about.”

She said, “Cut yourself some slack, honey. The pure self-control you have to not just yell every time people act like that toward you is amazing. The fact that you couldn’t be doubly amazing right that minute isn’t really a character flaw. Sometimes when you feel so much emotion you have to walk away. We’re all good now, honey. I wasn’t mad at you and you’re not mad at me, even though my inaction put you in a really hard situation. It’s over. We won’t repeat it. Christmas will be fun. Maybe you can send me one of those French soup recipes you were telling me about. I’ll get the ingredients and you two can get the spices there and bring them here since they’re probably things I can’t get easily locally.”

“We can do that. I’ll take a picture of the ingredients and text it to you.”

Sebastian said, “We can make some fresh French bread to go with it.”

Burt said, “Now, we’re talking. How about you make that French custard stuff you sent a picture
I’ll send Carole the ingredients for that too.”

“Sounds good,” Burt said. “We’ll talk more later and we’ll see you the 23rd.”

“Good night, you two.”

“Good night,” they both said.

Kurt disconnected the call.

Kurt turned on his side, pecked Sebastian on the lips, and snuggled into him. “I was 16. My dad and Carole had just started dating. He and Finn hit it off. Finn was everything that my dad wanted in a son. He took Finn out to a sporting event and didn’t invite me. I was jealous. I dressed butch, sang a Mellencamp song, and Brittany asked me out. I didn’t feel like I was leading her on since it was her idea. She knew I was gay, but my more masculine clothing gave her the impression that I was what she called ‘little g gay’ instead of ‘capital G Gay’, which in Brittany-speak meant that she thought that I might be bi. She and I were kissing when my dad came downstairs. We weren’t making out, although Brittany was trying. We were both fully dressed. I didn’t let her touch me. I kept moving her hand every time she’d move it onto my thigh. I wanted to be more like Finn. You would have laughed at me for sure. I was wearing a flannel shirt, denim overalls, and a trucker’s cap.”

“I’m not into trucker’s caps, but I might be into you in flannel and overalls. Actually, I’m pretty certain that I’m into you in anything.” He kissed the top of Kurt’s head.

“Bas!”

“Even if the flannel and overalls don’t do anything for me, I can always take them off. Your birthday suit is definitely sexy.”

Kurt’s eyes flashed with indignation. “Bas!”

“Yes, cupcake?”

Kurt let out a sigh of exasperation.

Sebastian started to sing.

Sugar pie, honey bunch
I’d do anything you ask to
I can’t help myself:
I want you and nobody else.

Sugar pie, honey bunch,
You know that I love you.
I can’t help myself.
I love you and nobody else.

“I love you too, Bas.”

“If you’re trying to come up with reasons why I should change how I feel about you, telling me
that you kissed a girl in attempt to be the son you thought your dad would want when you were 16 isn’t the way to do it. That was a long time ago and you were a kid in a homophobic small town. To be honest, I’m surprised you didn’t stick it out. Wasn’t that when you were cheering? If you had stayed with her, you two could have been the cute cheerleading ‘it’ couple and you probably wouldn’t have gotten bullied much anymore, if at all. It’s not like you would have been the first gay teen or man to have a beard.”

“That’s true.”

Sebastian started singing again.

*Let it go. Let it go.*

*The past is in the past.*

Kurt laughed.

Sebastian stopped singing. “I have succeeded.”

“And a reward for your efforts.” Kurt wrapped his hand around Sebastian’s neck and scooted up enough that he could kiss him.

“My reward was hearing you laugh, but I’ll take kisses any time.”

Kurt kissed him again.

The washer beeped.

“We’re being paged to the laundry closet.”

Sebastian harrumphed.

Kurt laughed again. He kissed Sebastian again. “Come on. Let’s go be responsible and get the shirts out.”

“Responsible shmonsible.”

“Yep, that’s me. Mr. Schmonsible.” Kurt sat up and climbed across the ottoman and headed towards the washer.

Sebastian got up and followed him, but he opened the dryer first instead. He took the coveralls out and folded them neatly. He helped with the shirts next. While Kurt finished hanging the last few, Sebastian grabbed the pants from their bedroom and started spraying them. It didn’t take too long to get them all in the washer. “How about we turn it on in the morning? I don’t want to have to get up again and fool with them tonight?”

“You have other plans?”

“I do and they don’t involve pants.” He waggled his eyebrows and smirked.

Kurt smiled and rolled his eyes. “You warned me. I know you did. But it still surprises me.”

“What?”

“The shameless flirting.”

“I did warn you.” He started to sing what he had been singing earlier.
Boy, close your eyes
Let that rhythm get into you
Don’t try to fight
There ain’t nothing that you can do

He stepped closer to Kurt and gently pulled him flush. As he sang, he began to make it clear what he meant by his body motions.

Relax your mind
Lay back and groove with mine
You gotta feel that heat
And we can ride the boogie

Share that heat of love
I want to rock with you – all night
Dance out into day – sunlight
I want to rock with you – all night
Rock the night away

Kurt barely whispered, “Yes.”

Sebastian danced them into the bedroom and began to undress Kurt.

Kurt closed the small space between them and kissed the back of Sebastian’s neck. “Good morning, beautiful.”

“Mmm. I’m all for cozy, but scoot back a little so I can turn over.”

Kurt moved back.

Sebastian flipped over so they were facing each other. “Good morning to you too. We’re going to have so much fun, and then be so sore.”

“I’ll give you a massage.”

“Mmm. My fun-filled day just got even better.”

“We missed our Saturday morning of pampering ourselves. It’s only 7:00. Sam and Lexi won’t be here until 9:00. We could do some of it before they get here, and then eat something we buy at Costco for breakfast.”

“You are full of good ideas. How about we start with massages?”

“Let’s turn the heat up for a little bit first.”

“Maybe we should get one of those little heaters that are like fans. We could turn it on just for short periods of time. I know we both sleep better in cooler temps snuggled under blankets, but it makes the idea of massages less fun if we have to freeze during them.”

“We’ll look at them when we go.”

“We could just snuggle and kiss or go take a warm sexy shower together. Or both.”

“Both sounds good. I’ll be right back.” Kurt made a mad dash for the washer and turned it on and
ran back to the bed and slid back under the covers. “We put it off last night, but it has to be done.”

Sebastian pulled him closer. “Snuggles.”

four hours later, Kurt stood with his key ready to open the door.

“Wait. Let me text her so we don’t scare her to death,” Sam said. He pulled his phone out.

“Okay.”

Kurt put the key in the lock and opened the door. The three of them carried in all of the bags. Sam shut the door behind them. Lexi was lying on the couch looking towards the door, snuggled under a blanket.

“You feeling better?” Sam asked.

“Yeah. I just needed more sleep. I stayed up too late doing that reading last night so I wouldn’t have to do it today. The headache is gone.”

“That’s good.”

“That looks like way too much food for two people.”

Kurt said, “We decided to stock up on everything non-perishable that we get. It’s a pain hauling stuff back on the subway.”

“I bet.” She sat up, and the got up to fold the blanket up. “So, cookies and decorating?”

“Yes,” Kurt said. “We got a ready-made pizza for lunch since we want to get busy on the cookie making.”

She said, “Works for me.” She grabbed the pizza and took it into the kitchen. She preheated the oven and looked for a pizza pan.

“We just bake them on the rack,” Kurt said. “We don’t have a pan that big. There’s directions for cooking it directly on the rack. Keep the cardboard so we can pull it back out. That’s a mistake we learned from.”

She laughed. “I can do that.” She turned it over and looked for the correct temperature again and adjusted it.

She moved out of the way while the other three emptied the bags efficiently. Kurt left the other two to continue after a few minutes. He went down to the spare room and came back with a tote. He opened it and pulled out the small tree he had gotten the previous year. He carefully moved the TV to the right end of the cabinet. They had left the lights on it the year before, so he just sat it on the circular Christmas placemat to keep it from scratching up the cabinet and plugged it in. He started to sing. He put a small tree skirt on it that he had made in his free time after the costuming for the play no longer took up his afternoons.

It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas
Everywhere you go.
Take a look at the five and ten. It’s glistening one again.
With candy canes and silver lanes that glow.
It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas.
Toys in every store,
But the prettiest sight to see is the holly that will be
On your own front door.

Sam took over-

A pair of hop-along boots and pistol that shoots
Is the wish of Barney and Ben.
Dolls that’ll talk and will go for a walk
Is the hope of Janice and Jen.
And Mom and Dad can hardly wait for school to start again.

Lexi joined him for the next part-

It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas
Everywhere you go.
There’s a tree in the grand hotel. One in the park as well.
It’s the sturdy kind that doesn’t mind the snow.

Kurt sang along again adding a lower harmony for the last part.

It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas.
Soon the bells will start.
The thing that will make them ring is the carol that you sing
Right within your heart.

Lexi asked, “What’s your range?” when they finished.

“A2 to A5 comfortably, a little lower and a little higher if I don’t have to hold the notes out.”

“That’s impressive.”

“Thanks.” He went back into the kitchen and washed his hands. He started to pull out what they
needed to make the cookies. He put the recipes down on the counter and everyone chose one. He
slid the pizza into the oven since it was preheated.

“What are you going to do with so many cookies?” Lexi asked.

Sebastian said, “Last year we took quite a few down to the security staff.”

“Oh, that’s nice. They do have to stay down there during the holidays. I hadn’t thought about it.”

Sebastian said, “There are seven of them on staff. Two work full-time weekdays. One works full-
time second shift. One works full-time third shift. The other three work first, second, and third
shift on the weekends. They work here as a second job since the hours are set and it still gives
them some time off on the weekends. They also fill in for the weekday people if one of them gets
sick or can’t come in. There’s also a 2-man maintenance crew that works weekdays.”

She asked, “So, these are rentals?”

“No. They used to be, but the building went co-op a few years back. Now, they’re like condos.
You buy them outright, or take out a mortgage. Plus, then there are monthly co-op fees that cover
the cost of the security and maintenance staff.”

“I see. Can you pass the sugar this way?” She grabbed it from Kurt. “Thanks.”
Kurt said, “This year, we’ll freeze some for them and defrost them before we take them down since we’re doing the baking so early. You two can take some with you too.”

They passed ingredients back and forth and continued to talk. They put the first batch of cookies in when the pizza came out. Kurt sliced it up, put it on plates, and handed them to everyone. They sat down at the table.

“How’s the semester going?” Kurt asked.

“Not as bad as I had feared,” Sam said. “The school has a good tutoring department and some patient students that work there. I’m working on getting some official testing and documentation so I can get more help. My mom couldn’t find the stuff she had from when I was a kid.”

“What about you, Lexi?”

“The weirdest thing for me was moving back into a dorm after I had lived off campus all summer, but I really like the set up. It’s like an apartment in dorm setting. I actually really like it. No commuting time is a bonus too.”

“I’m moving into the craziness of end-of-semester performances and assessments. And we can’t really prepare ahead of time for them. We’ll get assigned the pieces a week before we have to perform them. That way no one can practice for three months and have an advantage.”

Sebastian said, “The dance pieces get taught this week and then they have to perform them the end of next week.”

“For our lecture-based classes it’s more like Sebastian’s classes. We read, we write papers or take tests, and then we have final papers or final exams.”

The oven beeped. Kurt got up and took the cookies out and put the next tray in. They continued to talk and once they finished the pizza, they sang songs and decorated the little tree in between taking cookies out and putting them in. By 1:00, all of the cookies were done and they had cleaned the kitchen. They put their coats on and went to Rockefeller Center to go ice skating.

When they left Rockefeller Center, Sebastian led them to another place that Cassie had recommended, a nearby Cuban place. None of them had ever had Cuban food before, so they ordered four different things and asked for four plates. They sat at a booth and ate everything family style.

When they got back to the apartment, Sebastian got Lexi to help him make hot chocolate for everyone. Sam and Kurt went in the spare room and talked for a few minutes.

Kurt closed the door behind him and sat on the bed next to Sam. “Things are actually going okay, right?” Kurt asked. “You’re not just saying it because Lexi is around.”

“No, I mean yes. Yes, things are going okay. I have A’s in my art classes and I’m around the B-/C+ range for my non-art classes. Once I get that paperwork, I’ll get more help and I think I can keep closer to a B average.”

“Good.”

“What about you and Sebastian? You’re really okay, right? I know you say so on the phone, but he’s treating you right, isn’t he? He’s not-”
“He’s not pressuring me. He’s really just like he was when you were here. Calm, hard-working, and he’s sweet to me. He really cares. He kept me from crashing and burning with the play. He was really supportive.”

“Good.”

“I still miss you. I got used to us being together again, but I’m glad that things are going well. We just need to do better at making time to talk. I write to Mercedes, but that doesn’t work as well with us. I’ll send you my schedule again and we can try to work it out.”

“We will. Being there is like being in high school in a way because I see the same people in class all the time, but it’s better because I get to take a lot more classes that interest me. The whole thing is really time-consuming. It makes me all the more sorry for what I participated in when I first came.”

“Let’s not go there again. That’s ancient history now.”

“That was two years ago.”

“Ancient history. Modern times started a little over a year ago when you saved me from myself. No amount of back rent or grocery money could compare to you knocking some sense into me. The scale is definitely tipped to your side. Even with the craziness of school and working, I actually really enjoy my life now. You being a couch surfer for 6 months back then is nothing compared to me getting the life I have now. Seriously, in all the years you’ve known me, have I ever seemed genuinely relaxed and like I enjoyed my life?”

“When it was just us at home, I saw this side of you. But not at school or around other people.”

“Sebastian started going to yoga and the combat training club with me early in the mornings. The first week he went with me, which was right after the play, we went in and Max said, ‘You are aware that coming here and training will not help you kick his butt? He’s better than the rest of us.’ to Sebastian. His response was, ‘I don’t need to kick his butt, but the rest of you…’ He wasn’t offended that Max said he had no chance of beating me. He felt no need to defend himself and say that he would be able to once he practiced. He actually looked proud of me and of himself in a way, like he was proud that he had a badass boyfriend. He fights fair. He learns from his mistakes. He still can’t best me in a fight, but he’s improved a lot. He doesn’t take it as a personal affront that I’m better than him at it. It’s not a competition between the two of us. It’s an individual competition on working on our own improvements. He compliments me. He’s so flirty it’s nuts. He doesn’t do it when other people are around because he knows it embarrasses me, but he’s the king of flirting and innuendo. It’s just very, very different. Extraordinarily different in a good way.”

“I’m glad for you. You deserve someone who thinks you’re stunning and amazing.”

“Thank you. How are things with you and Lexi? You’ve been together five months or so.”

“They’re good. I’ve done a lot of introspection. I’m over Mercedes. I finally figured out what she and Brittany had in common.”

Kurt looked confused.

“Yeah, I know. That’s how it seemed to me too until I spent a lot of time thinking about it. It wasn’t anything about them physically or their interests. It was the fact that both of them looked at me like a whole person, like I wasn’t defective somehow. Quinn used me for my popularity to get
back on top. Santana used me as her beard. But Mercedes liked me when I had nothing to offer her. Even when we dated the second time, she didn’t date me because I was a model. Brittany accepted me, just me. I loved both of them. And I’ve fallen in love with Lexi.”

Kurt’s face lit up. “Does she know? Does she love you?”

“Yes and yes. I told her two weeks ago.”

Kurt tackled hugged him. “I’m so happy for you.”

“I would never have guessed,” Sam teased. “What about you and Sebastian?”

“I was already in love with him when he asked me to be his boyfriend. I just hadn’t realized it. He had known since May.”

“Oh, wow.”

“We better get back out there or our hot chocolate is going to be barely warm chocolate.” Kurt stood up and pulled Sam up. He hugged Sam again. “I’m really so excited for you.”

“Thanks. I’m glad Sebastian’s good to you. You deserve that.” Sam opened the door and they went back to the kitchen.

Lexi and Sebastian were standing there, cookies in their mouths.

Kurt laughed at them. “Mmm hmm. We leave you out here for 10 minutes and you get into the cookies without us.” He wrapped his arms around Sebastian and kissed him, barely more than a peck, but he still surprised him.

Lexi said, “There are plenty of cookies left for the two of you. And the hot chocolate is done.”

“I made Parisian chocolate chaud.” He got four mugs down and poured the hot chocolate in them. He took the first sip. “It’s the right temperature.”

The other three took sips of theirs.

“That’s really good,” Lexi said.

Kurt wrapped his arm around Sebastian’s waist. “It is. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

Once they finished their drinks, it was time for their goodbyes. Sam and Lexi put their coats on and Sam grabbed the cookies they were taking back with them. There were hugs all around.

“We’re glad you came today,” Kurt said.

Sam nodded. “I’m glad we came, too.”

As soon as Sebastian turned around from locking the door, Kurt stepped closer and kissed him. “You, darling, look like you’re in desperate need of a massage.” He ran his hands up Sebastian’s arms to his shoulders, and then put them on the sides of Sebastian’s neck and kissed him again, and again, and again. “Let’s go see if that little space heater lives up to the claims printed on the box.” He stepped back and took off towards their room.
Sebastian quickly turned off the lights and followed him. He closed the door behind him. Kurt took the little heater out of the box and plugged it in. He put it on the keyboard bench and turned it on.

Sebastian asked, “Do you want to take a quick shower and give it time to warm the room up?”

Instead of answering, Kurt started undressing. A few minutes later, they were both in the shower.

“What brought on you kissing me in front of people?” He kissed Kurt. “I definitely don’t mind. I was just surprised. You haven’t kissed me in front of anyone except when we were in France.”

“I don’t really know how to explain it exactly. I was excited and I just felt like kissing you.”

“What were you excited about?”

“Sam’s in love with Lexi. And she loves him too. I’m just really excited for him. He’s a really great guy and as much as I love Mercedes, she doesn’t seem like she’s going to be interested in giving up the touring and all that for a long time. They were really good together, and he’s been stuck on her for ages and I can imagine how much harder it is to get over someone when the relationship was good. There was no reason to break up other than life circumstances.”

“So, you were excited for him and kissed me?”

“Yes, but not exactly. I know that sounds weird. I was excited for him so I hug-tackled him in the other room. Him having someone to love and who loves him back made me feel like being affectionate with you wouldn’t be braggy or showing off or make him feel bad.”

“I get it now. You were only being mildly affectionate with me because you didn’t want to rub it in his face that you had someone because you didn’t know whether he and Lexi were serious or just dating socially or casually or whatever. When he agreed to move in together with her, I just made the assumption that he had made it over the hump of still pining for Mercedes. You didn’t make that assumption.”

“No. I guess I needed to hear it from him personally. When we went to Mercedes’ concert, I could tell from the way he was acting that it was hard for him because he was still in love with her. I knew he made a choice to move on. And moving in with Lexi could have just been part of that choice. They were moving into a dorm apartment. If it didn’t work out, he could have moved out and into a regular dorm room without costing him or her any extra money. We’ve only seen him a couple of times. Just hearing him say it made me really happy for him. I hope she’s good for him whether they stay together past when she graduates in two years or not. He’s been through a lot and I want him to be happy like I am.” He turned the water off.

Sebastian grabbed Kurt’s towel and handed it to him, and then grabbed his own. Once they were dry, Kurt pulled out the towels he got for the massages to keep the oil off the sheets. He and Sebastian pulled the covers back and put the towels on the bed.

“It’s a lot warmer in here now,” Sebastian said. He lay face down on the bed.

Kurt grabbed the massage oil and started on Sebastian’s calves.

“Ow. Right there.”

“I can feel it. I’ll work on it.”

“What would your parents want for Christmas? Or do you not exchange gifts?”
“We used to, but he and I were never big on Christmas being about getting a lot of presents. It was a time for family and togetherness. The shop would actually be closed and he’d stay home for two days in a row and we’d just hang around and watch TV and play games.”

“We could buy a new game and take it with us. I still think we should get Grandma a set of Cards Against Humanity.”

Kurt ran his hands along Sebastian’s calf again and he didn’t wince. “There. That’s better.” He moved his hands to work on Sebastian’s other leg.

“Thank you.”

Kurt leaned back and turned and kissed Sebastian on the cheek since he couldn’t reach his lips. “You’re welcome.” He turned around, sat up, and went back to what he was doing.

Tuesday after an early lunch, Kurt met with Mr. Salazar for the first time in over a month.

“Come on in. Long time, no see.” Mr. Salazar shut the door behind them, and then walked around behind his desk and sat down. “So, how are things going?”

“Really well, except Thanksgiving was a bust for the day.” He briefly explained what had happened.

“So, you walked away and then felt bad about not saying goodbye and not giving her the chance to spend the rest of the day with you and Sebastian rather than her family?”

“Yeah, but we talked it out. We’re fine now. I was just really upset that I had done it to her because of her losing Finn.”

“That’s understandable. But you stood up for yourself and didn’t sit around letting people bully you verbally or silently, and you didn’t lash out at them. That seems like a good way to have handled it, except like you said, maybe waiting long enough to tell your father and stepmother goodbye. And you realized something about yourself that you hadn’t realized, and now you can deal with that.”

“My knee-jerk reaction to walk away from a situation and removing myself as a choice is based on irrefutable historical evidence of not being chosen, but the people who consistently didn’t choose me aren’t part of my life anymore. And now that I’ve actually consciously thought about the issue, I think it’s just something I need to be aware of. I just need to stop myself from withdrawing or giving up because of an assumption.”

“From what you’ve said Sebastian chooses you consistently. He could go out and party or go out drinking, not cheating on you, but just out with other guys, hanging out, doing whatever, but he doesn’t.”

“He does choose me.” Kurt smiled. “He’s really sweet.”

“So, you’ve said.” He chuckled.

“Rejection is a big part of the profession, so I’ll need to deal with it because it’s inevitable. I just have to cover that fear of rejection when I audition.”

“You got the lead in the fall play, so you must have some ability to hide the underlying feeling of
inadequacy.”


Mr. Salazar laughed. “You were really good, by the way.”

“Thank you.”

“Are things with Sebastian still balanced? You haven’t let yourself slip to always giving again have you?”

“Nope. There’s not a hint of it because Bas is very giving. He wouldn’t let the balance slip that way because he’d feel like he was taking advantage of me. We both do things for each other, when asked and voluntarily. We split the cooking. We do our shopping together. We each just clean as we go. Bigger things like the bathroom and dusting, we just do together on Sundays. So, I’m not the homemaker or housekeeper. We both do what needs done. It’s still amazing not to ever have to feel like I’m responsible for him.”

“Are you both still okay with how things are? I know I told you I’m not a sex therapist, but the give and take and expectations – are those still on equal footing?”

“Actually, the give and take is amazing. The whole experience is so different. The ‘working our way up to it’ experience was very enjoyable. And it really changed he whole dynamic for me. It’s not this thing that I do for someone else, which also feels good. It’s this experience Bas and I share. He makes sure that I know he loves me and he’s a huge flirt still after all these months. I don’t really know how to explain it without going into details, but it’s really nothing like what I had experienced before. Maybe a good comparison is exercising on one of those stair machines versus actually running up stairs. Same act, but yet completely and totally different.”

“It sounds to me like you can let yourself be vulnerable.”

“That’s true. When we’re together no matter what we’re doing, there’s no walls, no masks, no performance. I’m just me and he’s just himself. I think we’d gotten to know each other really well since we had lived together for so long, so it wasn’t like there were any surprises really. The three of us already did a lot of the domestic things together. The scary part was allowing myself to risk losing his friendship by moving into a romantic relationship with him. I had already lost Adam to England and Sam to college.”

“So, how about school then?”

“I picked my classes for next semester. It was weird thinking about how that would the last time I did it. At this point in the spring semester, I’ll need to start auditioning and hope that I can get a role doing something. If I don’t have any success with that, I’ll start to look into getting a position doing costumes for a production. I’m excited to see what musical we’ll be doing in the spring.”

“Has anything else been bothering you?”

“When I talked to my parents about the Thanksgiving Day mess, I realized something that I had never really considered. When I was talking to Carole, she said she didn’t tell her extended family that I’m gay and my first reaction was to assume that she was embarrassed, but I was wrong. She told me that she doesn’t think of me as her ‘gay’ son – that when she says something about me to anyone, it’s about what kind of person I am or what kind of things I do, like the acting, singing, and costuming. She said that the fact that I’m gay doesn’t affect her in any way other than the fact that she might someday have a son-in-law and not a daughter-in-law.”
“That’s true.”

Kurt didn’t say anything for a minute or two. “Since my sexual orientation has been at the forefront of being excluded and bullied, including how her relatives acted that day, I’ve never considered people not seeing that about me as the first thing, as this identifying feature. ‘He’s the gay guy with the high voice.’ That’s what I’m used to. I’m described by my sexual orientation and the fact that my voice is unusually high for a man. Hearing her say that she does not see me as her ‘gay son’ just struck me as odd. I’ve been thinking about it. It’s like that underlying feeling of not being enough while yet being too much and the feeling that I should always acquiesce to keep the peace. That feeling of being gay as my defining trait is something that I want to be in the past, along with being bullied. I want people to say to describe me in other ways. The question is how to do that without using my acting skills to come across as straight and intentionally lowering speaking voice, which I can do, but strains my voice to do for long periods of time.”

“I can understand that. I spent a good bit of my youth being bullied and called unpleasant names because I’m Hispanic. I told them I WAS an American and it didn’t matter. I got really tired of being ‘the spic’ or whatever. I think for me it was just moving into New York City that made a big difference. There are so many different types of people here that it just becomes less relevant because there are too many Hispanic people here to use that as a definitive identifier for me. I think that once you move past college and spend less time around small town, conservative or bigoted people, you won’t get referred to that way as often and over time, people just won’t really think about it when they meet you. Unless, of course, you bring it up all the time. If you talk about being bullied for being gay, then it will bring it to the forefront of their mind. Policing your behavior all the time makes it a bigger deal to people who might not have cared or paid any attention. People pick up on the tension or your anxiety. And people feel more uneasy around anxious or nervous people. It’s just the way we’re wired. But if you act as if Sebastian being your boyfriend is a normal as having a girlfriend, that will change perceptions too.”

“Except for bigots, who then make a big deal about how we’re ruining their evening by having to see us make out in public, even if we’re just hugging.”

“Right. But bigots aren’t going to change their minds just because you stay invisible. I could use some kind of skin lightening products and make myself look more Caucasian, but that wouldn’t make bigoted people less bigoted. Giving off the vibe of shame and embarrassment when you’re out together merely gives people the feeling that you think you’re doing something wrong. If people see you happy and playfully interactive like a guy and a girl who have a good relationship, people who are not dead-set in their homophobic ways may see you and have a ‘love is love’ epiphany. Sometimes people just can’t imagine how two guys could be a in a loving, romantic relationship and seeing the two of you being sweet to each other and interacting in kind, considerate ways might be the first time they ever see a gay couple act like a couple. I’m not suggesting that you sit in the halls at school and basically have sex with your clothes on. But people seeing you holding hands or chastely kissing or hugging could normalize it for people who’ve never been around it before.”

“I can see that. And I know there’s no easy answer to not being perceived as gay above all else – other than intentionally acting differently than I normally do, and lowering my voice. But I’m still going to work on eventually having more people in my life who see me first and foremost as their friend as opposed to their ‘gay friend’. I want what is defining and noteworthy about me to be something other than my sexual orientation.”

“I think that’s a reasonable goal. I look at you and you’ve made a huge turn around in a year. You’re a lot more self-assured. You have a much more positive outlook. I won’t see you again for nearly two months since you’re not going to be in town a month from now. If you have any urgent
issues, I can try to fit you in before you leave. But I think you’ve pretty much gotten the hang of working through things. And you current relationship is a positive for you. And school is going well. I’m glad for you.”


“You too.”

Sebastian came in the door and Kurt scurried over to meet him. He took his coat and hung it in the closet and turned back and hugged Sebastian as soon as he had gotten his boots in the cabinet.

“Good afternoon, beautiful.” He kissed Sebastian. “Welcome home. Dinner’s done.”

“It smells good.” He held Kurt tight and buried his nose into Kurt’s neck and kissed him on the neck before he let go. He walked into the kitchen to wash his hands. He reached to get the towel and Kurt handed it to him and kissed him again.

This time, he didn’t stop at the chaste kisses he had given him at the door. He pinned Sebastian against the counter with his body and put his hands on the nape of his neck, ran his hands through Sebastian’s hair, and kissed him breathless. Sebastian happily went along and wrapped his hands around Kurt’s waist and held him close and kissed him back for all he was worth.

When they broke for air, Sebastian said, “Did something amazing happen today? You are very cheerful.”

“Let’s see. This morning, I woke up snuggled up to my favorite person. That’s always an amazing way to start the day.” He kissed him. “Then my very best friend went to yoga and combat training with me.” He kissed him again. “When I was studying in the library before my classes started, this really handsome guy sat next to me and flirted with me.” He kissed him again. “And after I finished my classes and my shift at work, I made dinner and my boyfriend came home to eat with me.” He kissed him breathless again. “I just want my favorite person, who is my very best friend and also handsome boyfriend, to know how much I love him.”

Sebastian closed the small space between them and kissed Kurt. “I love you too.” After a few more minutes of kissing, Sebastian asked, “Do you have a lot of homework tonight?”

“Nope. I don’t have my song assignments and we didn’t learn the dance yet, so I have nothing to practice and I did most of my reading this morning.”

“Will you read my senior thesis paper? I think it’s finished.”

“Oh, wow. Of course. I’d love to read it. My idea was to eat, shower early, and then snuggle up on the couch and read in our onsies or watch a move since we haven’t done that in a while.”

“Sounds perfect.”

They put the stew that Kurt had made into bowls and sat down and ate together. Kurt initiated them playing footsie under the table, causing Sebastian to smile. Once they finished, they cleaned up and headed to the shower. They enjoyed a nice hot mutually satisfying shower full of kisses and caresses. They redressed in their onesies and Sebastian grabbed the next to last book from the series Kurt had gotten him for his birthday and his thesis out of his bag.
They fluffed the throw pillows and put the ottoman in the corner. They climbed up and Kurt sat with his knees slightly bent, making a bridge over Sebastian’s lap. Sebastian propped the book on one of the throw pillows and Kurt’s knee so that he had one free hand. He took Kurt’s hand and interlaced their fingers. Kurt still had his right hand free to make any notes on Sebastian’s paper. They sat like that until Kurt had finished reading.

“You make a lot of really interesting points. I enjoyed reading it. It made me think. I don’t spend time thinking about translations of what I read in French because I don’t have to slow down to look words up in a French-English dictionary and then spend time reading through multiple explanations of possible different meanings based on context. If I find a word I don’t know, I just look it up in a French dictionary. But that’s because I’ve continued to read harder and harder books in French and I didn’t every lose the native speaker aspect of my ability to understand French, but if I had to read a book in Spanish, I would definitely run into the struggle of looking words up in more than one dictionary to get an understanding of the connotation of the word, not just the denotation, like you discussed. It makes me wonder how many texts have been translated so far past the point in time they were written that the meaning is at least partially lost or misinterpreted because the meanings of words changed between the time of the original writing and the translation. Or they been translated wrong just completely wrong because of a spelling mistake or variance. I look at old and middle English and the spelling was just a mess. If other languages have had similar issues, it’s a wonder anything old can be translated at all. I had never thought about the stuff you wrote about losing cultures as their native languages die out without a written form. It’s sad to think about, but from what you wrote there are linguists trying to do what should have been done ages ago.”

“Did you find any places where I was unclear or I made any grammar mistakes?”

“Nope. I think it’s really well written and it’s really interesting. My gorgeous boyfriend is also a nerdy, smarty pants, which makes him all the more attractive.” He pulled Sebastian’s hand up to his lips and kissed his knuckles. “Let’s redo the pillows and snuggle up and watch a movie.”

Wednesday morning, Kurt and Sebastian were stretching before the Advanced Dance course was going to start. Madame Tibideaux walked into the classroom in her typical regal way, saying nothing but parting the room like Moses. Everyone was on edge and froze after they moved out of her way. She walked directly to Kurt and handed him a golden ticket for the Winter Showcase. She nodded, turned on her heel, and walked out as regally as she had walked in.

Four hours later, Sebastian arrived at Vogue. He knocked lightly on Kurt’s office door. Kurt looked up. “Bas!” He got up from his desk and pulled Sebastian into a hug. “Did you do it or are you still going to get other people to read through it?”

“I did it. I turned it into my thesis advisor. We’ll see what she has to say in a few days. Did you do it? Did you open the letter?”

“Not yet. It’s like this dream. I feel like if I open it, I’ll wake up and find myself lying in bed.”

“Well, if this is a dream, then I’m lying in bed right next to you snuggled as close as we can get. And I’ll be there for you if you wake up when you open it.”

“You’re a sweetie.” Kurt kissed him. “Come inside the rest of the way and I’ll open it.” He sat
down at his desk and pulled the envelope out of the book he had put it in for safekeeping. He grabbed a letter opener out of his desk and carefully slid it under the seal, leaving the seal intact. He carefully pulled out the invitation.

*Carmen Tibideaux cordially invites
Kurt Hummel
To perform in the 2015
Winter Showcase*

Behind the invitation to perform were two tickets for Kurt to give to people to come to the Winter Showcase.

*This ticket admits Kurt’s Hummel’s guest to the
New York Academy of Dramatic Arts Winter Showcase
December 19, 2015 – 8:00pm*

“I’m not dreaming.”

“Not dreaming what, Kurt?” Isabelle said from the doorway.

“I got a golden ticket to perform in the Winter Showcase.”

“So, Carmen handed them out today? She was working on them still yesterday. She does the calligraphy by hand on each invitation.”

“I know. I just never thought I would get one. I told Bas I thought I was dreaming, but I opened it and I didn’t wake up or find an empty envelope.”

“Oh, it’s real. I saw the list she was working on. She swore me to secrecy of course.”

“Of course.”

“You’ll come watch me, right?” He pulled out the tickets and offered one to her. He gave one to Sebastian without asking.

She looked stunned. “You want me to come? What about your dad?”

“It’s a long drive or an expensive flight just to hear me sing one song. He’s heard me sing in the round room once before – after I got out of the hospital year before last. Plus, I know that you’ve been my fairy godmother in more ways than one. I know you’re the one that helped me get into NYADA. I asked Madame Tibideaux why she turned me down after praising my audition. I know what happened.”

“I see. Well, I’d do it again. I would love to go.” She took the ticket. “Thank you.” She went across the hall and came right back. “I’m pretty sure the maroon jacquard suit jacket with the thin black silk lapel and the matching bowtie are still in the Vault. Pair them with a black button-up shirt with black buttons and nice fitted trousers.”

“Good idea.”

“If it’s not there, quite a few things from the Tom Ford shoot we did for the Christmas layout are in there.”

“Thank you. I’ll go in and look when I get off, if that’s okay.”
“Sure.” She smiled and winked at him. She left and went back to her office.

“I have to make more phone calls. You can stay in here, but I’m sure I’ll distract you from whatever you need to get done.”

“I’ll meet you in the lobby when you get off.” He handed Kurt the ticket. “Will you put this back in the envelope with your invitation?”

“You don’t want to go with me?” Kurt sounded distraught, but tried to cover it.

Sebastian leaned down and kissed him. “Of course I do. But all I have in my bag is my iPad, one of my paperback books for a class, and some random stuff. I don’t want it to get lost.”

“Okay.” He slipped it back into the envelope and put it in his book like he had it before. He second-guessed himself. He wondered whether he should have at least offered the ticket to his dad first. He just shook his head slightly and willed himself back to the present and the phone calls he needed to make.

“I’ll take your bag with me if it’s okay. I’m going to run home and do a few things there and come back.” He leaned over, kissed Kurt chastely, and took Kurt’s bag since he didn’t say not to.

At 3:00, Sebastian was back wearing a pair of dark wash slim-fit Levis, the Thom Browne gray boots, a green button-up shirt with a tiny gray print, a charcoal gray pullover sweater, and his black pea coat instead of the puffer jacket he had been wearing earlier.

Kurt came down just a few minutes later. He walked straight towards him and kissed him before taking his hand. “You went home and spruced up your outfit. It looks good.”

“Thank you. I’ve come to take my amazing boyfriend who got a golden ticket today out for an early dinner to a place someone recommended to me today. It’s a Peruvian Asian infusion restaurant and it supposedly has great lunch specials until 4:30, so let’s go.”

“Peruvian and Asian – unusual combination. Sounds like just the type of place to try for a celebration. So, that’s why you texted me and said to wait to raid the vault until tomorrow?”

“It is. I wanted to take you out.”

Kurt stepped closer and squeezed Sebastian’s hand.

The week continued as it normally did. Saturday morning they lounged around and pampered themselves. Sunday, they did their weekly shopping, but just for perishables. And they did their weekly cleaning before picking a French film on Netflix to watch during the afternoon before they went back to studying.

The following Monday evening, they went Salsa dancing.

Tuesday, Kurt finally got the music he was supposed to prepare for his finals the following week. Sebastian got his senior thesis paper back and got an A. Kurt cooked him his favorite meal and baked him brownies to celebrate.

Kurt also started to work on his dance, which turned out to be a lot of fun because Miss July
decided to pair them with same-gender partners. And since there were 10 girls and 7 guys, she assigned Kurt to dance with Sebastian.

Friday he picked up a packet to audition for the spring musical, which was finally revealed to be *Mamma Mia*. He spent his Saturday afternoon and Sunday late afternoon and evening working on the sides for the audition and the song.

The next Friday after yoga and combat training club, Sebastian went with Kurt to check the cast list. Since it had gone up 30 minutes before, no one was in the hall near the bulletin board anymore. They walked up and scanned the list.

“I’m Sam. I’m Sam!” He turned and hugged Sebastian. “I’m not Harry. I’m Sam,” he said quietly.”

Sebastian spoke quietly because Kurt was. “Why are you so excited to be Sam and not Harry?”

“It’s just that Harry is actually gay, but he slept with Donna. Sam is straight. He ends up marrying Donna.”

“Right. I remember. I get it. You’re excited that you got cast as the straight guy.”

“After the whole fiasco in high school and listening to people say that I’m too effeminate to be believed as the straight lead, I’m thrilled. Let’s go get my copy of the script and the music.” Kurt took Sebastian’s hand and took off down the hallway.

“Hummel. You’re up,” Miss July said, as she stepped into the doorway.

He nodded. He went in the dance studio and took his place at the center of the room. Sebastian stood on the edge of the room to Kurt’s right. The music started and they moved towards each other. The dance looked like a combination between a tango and a street fight. It was intense and moving. When they finished, Kurt stayed in place and Sebastian walked back to the side of the room.

“You’ve improved immensely since starting here three years ago. You didn’t waiver under my instruction and you’ve always listened carefully to what you didn’t do right and corrected it.”

“I’ve appreciated your honesty. I’ve had other instructors who were much less specific in the corrections and it was very difficult to improve under their teaching. I had no real dance training when I came here, so watching myself as a few others told me to do, wasn’t that useful.”

“I’m not big into ‘figure it out yourself’. I get paid to make the students better dancers, not to be their friends or for them to like me. You’ve never seemed to quake in your figurative boots around me.”

“You may be demanding, but you are not unreasonable. And you are thorough. As you mentioned, you get paid to teach me to dance. I pay to learn to dance better. I want to learn and I’ve learned a lot. I’ve always chosen to enroll in your sections whenever I possibly could.”

“Well, you’ve earn an A for the semester. And congratulations on getting a lead in the spring musical.”
“Thank you.”

“Although I will say that you’ll give the make up department a run for their money needing to make your very youthful face look like you’re old enough to be Eileen’s dad.”

Kurt laughed. “A wig will help too. And a 90’s box-cut suit.”

“Have a nice break. I have more people to torture.” She turned to Sebastian. “You can go ahead and go. There are just two couples left and they’re girls.”

“Thanks. Happy holidays.”

They headed to the showers and dressed in regular clothes.

“So, lunch with Isabelle and then you have to work, but I’m get to hang around and be the PA’s assistant.”

At 5:30 Saturday afternoon, Kurt and Sebastian were getting ready to warm up some leftovers for dinner before they started to get ready for the evening. Kurt and the other performers had run through their pieces that morning. Sebastian’s phone pinged with a text. He looked at it and went to the door and opened it.

Kurt looked confused, but waited near the table. Isabelle pushed Grandma into the apartment. Behind them came Carole and Burt. Kurt’s face changed from confused to excited to thrilled in a rapid succession.

“What’s going on?”

Carole walked over to the table and with a box with several bags in it. “Well, we’ve brought dinner.”

“I see that.” Once she had sat the box down, he hugged her. “What are you all doing here? We’re coming to see all of you in a few days.”

Burt said, “Well, a little bird, or maybe it was a fairy, told us that you got chosen to perform in the most illustrious NYADA event of the season.”

Kurt immediately looked at Isabelle. She shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

“I see. Well, make yourselves at home. We can give you and Carole a quick tour if you’d like. Isabelle can get the plates out and help Grandma get comfortable.” Kurt took their coats and hung them up before showing them around quickly.

They went back to the dining room and sat down around the table.

“I see that someone stopped at our favorite Chinese place.”

“We did, but I ordered you something savory, not spicy so it won’t bother your throat,” Isabelle said.

“Thank you.”

They plated their food and started to eat.
“So, explain this to me. Obviously, Sebastian was in on the surprise.” Kurt winked at him.

“Well,” Isabelle started. “I may have told Grandma about you getting a golden ticket.”

“Mmm hmmm,” Kurt said.

“And from there, it sort of snowballed into an all-family event. She invited your parents and bought tickets for all three of them. And they flew here to watch you.”

“You didn’t get a hotel room, did you? You can stay here with us.”

“Sebastian arranged it all. Grandma is staying with me at my place and your parents are staying here. Tomorrow we’re all going to the Rainbow Room for the holiday brunch.”

“No way,” Kurt said.

Isabelle laughed. “Grandma insisted that she get to choose the venue.”

“I like it there,” Grandma Smythe said. “I haven’t been in ages, and now that the reopened last year, I’ll get another chance.”

Kurt just smiled and shook his head slightly in disbelief. He opted not to say anything else and enjoy having everyone together. “How are the three of you going tonight?”

“I bought tickets, dear.”

“I didn’t think there would be any left. I should have thought about that. I know it’s a fundraiser. The winner tonight gets part of the money raised in a scholarship for the next semester and the rest goes for improvements and funding whatever they need.”

“That’s where Sebastian came in. You were busy with preparing to perform on top of performing for your finals and preparing for the spring musical auditions,” Isabelle said.

“We’ll be back to see that in the spring,” Burt said.

Carole said, “I love Mamma Mia. I can’t wait.”

Isabelle had the car service pick them up at 7:00. When they arrived at the school, Sebastian walked around with everyone while Kurt went to warm up. They took their seats about 7:50. Kurt came in and sat down with them. Sebastian was sitting next to the empty seat. Kurt reached out for his hand as soon as he sat down. Sebastian squeezed it and interlaced their fingers.

At exactly 8:00, Madame Tibideaux stood and moved to the center of the performance area.

“Welcome to the New York Academy of Dramatic Arts annual Winter Showcase. While this is a competition, it is also a celebration. Every year, the faculty chooses 10 students who exemplify the best of what this school is trying to achieve.” She went on to introduce the first performer.

Kurt sang 8th out of the 10 performers.

“Next we have senior Kurt Hummel singing ‘Waving Through a Window’ from the musical Dear Evan Hansen.”

She walked back to her place as Kurt stood and walked to the stage – gracefully and poised this
time, not stiffly and frightened like he had the first time he had performed. He waited for the introduction and started to sing.

I've learned to slam on the brake,
Before I even turn the key,
Before I make the mistake,
Before I lead with the worst of me.

Give them no reason to stare.
No slipping up if you slip away.
So I got nothing to share.
No, I got nothing to say.

Step out, step out of the sun,
If you keep getting burned.
Step out, step out of the sun
Because you've learned, because you've learned.

On the outside, always looking in,
Will I ever be more than I've always been?
'Cause I'm tap, tap, tapping on the glass.
I'm waving through a window.
I try to speak, but nobody can hear.
So I wait around for an answer to appear,
While I'm watch, watch, watching people pass.
I'm waving through a window, oh.
Can anybody see, is anybody waving back at me?

We start with stars in our eyes.
We start believing that we belong.
But every sun doesn't rise.
And no one tells you where you went wrong.

Step out, step out of the sun,
If you keep getting burned.
Step out, step out of the sun
Because you've learned, because you've learned.

On the outside, always looking in,
Will I ever be more than I've always been?
'Cause I'm tap, tap, tapping on the glass.
Waving through a window.
I try to speak, but nobody can hear.
So I wait around for an answer to appear,
While I'm watch, watch, watching people pass.
Waving through a window, oh.
Can anybody see, is anybody waving?

When you're falling in a forest and there's nobody around,
Do you ever really crash, or even make a sound?
When you're falling in a forest and there's nobody around, Do you ever really crash, or even make a sound?
When you're falling in a forest and there's nobody around,
Do you ever really crash, or even make a sound?
When you're falling in a forest and there's nobody around,
Do you ever really crash, or even make a sound?
Did I even make a sound?
Did I even make a sound?
It's like I never made a sound
Will I ever make a sound?

On the outside, always looking in,
Will I ever be more than I've always been?
'Cause I'm tap, tap, tapping on the glass.
Waving through a window.
I try to speak, but nobody can hear.
So I wait around for an answer to appear,
While I'm watch, watch, watching people pass.
Waving through a window, oh.
Can anybody see, is anybody waving back at me?

Is anybody waving?
Waving, waving... Oh, oh, oh.

When he finished, he bowed, and waited for the applause to die down before he went back to his seat. He took Sebastian’s hand again. He took a slow deep breath and let it out just as slowly.

The last two students performed, and then there was a brief intermission.

Sebastian leaned over and spoke into his ear, “That was great. I hadn’t heard the song before and I don’t know the musical, but I really liked it. It suits your voice because you can hit those higher notes without flipping up into a falsetto like I would have to do to hit them.” He squeezed his hand and sat back upright.

A couple of minutes later, Madame Tibideaux returned to center stage and the audience fell silent. “It is my great pleasure to announce that this year’s Winter Showcase winner is Kurt Hummel.”

A thunderous round of applause rang out. Kurt stood up and went to the front. Sebastian managed to turn all of the sound off on his phone and get a couple of pictures as discretely as possible. Madame Tibideaux handed him an envelope and shook his hand.

“Mr. Hummel, truth be told, you were nominated by more than one faculty member to participate this year. We would love it if you would sing something else for us.”

Kurt nodded. Each of the singers had prepared a second song that they had practiced once with the orchestra. He placed the envelope behind the music on the piano and turned back towards the audience and gave his best performance of “Not the Boy Next Door”. He looked towards Madame Tibideaux when he finished. She was smiling and clapping. When the applause died down, he retrieved the envelope, and took his seat in the audience.

Madame Tibideaux stood up again. “Thank you all for coming this evening. Please stay to enjoy the desserts and drinks.”

A group of students pushed in tables along the sides of the room.
Madame Tibideaux greeted Isabelle, Burt, and Kurt. Isabelle introduced Grandma Smythe and Kurt introduced Carole. After a few minutes of chit chat, Madame Tibideaux moved on. Everyone got in line to get some dessert. Kurt was approached and stepped out of line to talk to the man. He ended up talking to several people who took down his name and contact information. Sebastian saw that he was busy and grabbed a piece of cheesecake for him and went back to sit down. Kurt eventually sat down next to him and ate the cheesecake.

“You won.”

“I did.”

Burt came over and Kurt handed his empty plate to Sebastian when he reached for it. Kurt stood up and Burt pulled him into a hug.

“That was some singing you did up there. It reminded me of when I walked in on you in the auditorium that time. You were singing ‘Everything’s coming up Kurt. Everything’s coming up Hummel.’ I think we all just saw that. You were amazing, Kurt. Don’t ever believe anything anyone tells you otherwise.”

Carole walked up while Burt was talking. “He’s right, honey. You are amazing. I’m so glad we let Mrs. Smythe talk us into coming.” She hugged him next.

Kurt said, “She’s hard to say ‘no’ to.”

Carole laughed. “That she is. That she is.” She stepped back because Grandma Smythe and Isabelle were back.

Grandma had heard what Kurt and Carole had said. “It’s hard to say ‘no’ because I’m a logical, sensible women with good ideas.”

They all laughed.

She stood up from her wheelchair and hugged Kurt. “You were fantastic, dear. I loved hearing you sing when I came last summer, but this was magnificent with the full orchestra and the acoustics in this room.” She sat back down.

Isabelle stepped forward to hug him. “I can’t get left out of the hugs.”

“Of course not, Isabelle.” He spoke quietly. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” She stepped back and winked at him.

Sebastian stepped up next to Kurt when he came back. Kurt reached out for him and he stepped closer. Kurt wrapped his arm around Sebastian’s waist and then turned and hugged him.

“You should probably go mingle some more. It’s my understanding that lots of hot shots attend this event to get a good look at up and coming talent.”

“Well, then, let’s go mingle our way to get a drink.”
The town car dropped Grandma Smythe and Isabelle off first since Isabelle’s place was closer to NYADA. The other four arrived back at the apartment close to 11:00. Sebastian unlocked the door and let everyone in. Kurt flipped into host mode as they walked through the door. He opened his closet and took Burt and Carole’s coats and hung them up before hanging up his own.

“Help yourself to anything if you’re hungry or thirsty. There may not be much because we go shopping on Sunday mornings.”

“Honey, we’re fine. We had that Chinese food before we went and we had dessert.”

He nodded. “You’re welcome to watch TV or relax out here for a while if you’d like. I’m pretty beat. It’s been a long week.”

“I’m sure it has, kiddo. You were great tonight.”

“Thanks. I’m glad you got to come. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you ahead of time and invite you. I didn’t want you to feel like you’d be letting me down if you didn’t come. I know that airplane tickets don’t grow on trees. I just want you to know that it wasn’t because I didn’t want you here.”

Carole said, “Relax. We know, honey.”

“It’s just that I told you I’d do a better job of not keeping things from you and this is the second thing this semester and both of them were actually good things.”

Burt asked, “What was the other thing?”

“I had a lead in the fall play, but I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want you to feel obligated to come and the subject matter of the play was really intense. It was definitely not a ‘feel good’ type of play. But you already know about the spring musical and it’s a fun one, so maybe you can come up with a way to come see it. I’ll text you the dates.”

“That will work. Usually the best prices for plane tickets are by getting them way ahead of time. We’ll talk more in the morning. You look really tired.”

Kurt nodded. He leaned back into Sebastian. “I am. We’ll see you in the morning.” He double-checked the door was locked. Before they walked off, he said, “The towels in the bathroom are clean. There are washcloths folded in a basket on the sink.”

“Thanks, honey.”

“Night.”
Sebastian lathered Kurt’s hair and massaged his scalp. Once he rinsed it, he kissed Kurt. “Do we need to be mindful of the hot water supply?”

“No. They’ll both shower in the morning.” He began to wash Sebastian’s hair.

“I need to ask you something.” He let Kurt rinse the shampoo out of hair. He put some of the body wash they had found that they both liked on his hands and began to use it as a way to massage Kurt’s back and shoulders. “You don’t really feel like that song you sang, do you?”

Kurt picked the bottle up and put some in his palm as well and made it a mutual massage. “Not exactly. I did for a long time. When I heard the song the first time, it was like a blast from the past. There was quite a while when I felt like if I disappeared it wouldn’t make a difference, like the part in the song about not making a sound by falling in the forest. I felt like I was on the outside looking in most of my life. I did feel like that, but I don’t now, especially after going to France. Your family accepted me so easily.”

Sebastian interrupted him with a gentle kiss. “Our family.”

Kurt nodded. “When the Apples wrote those notes on my birthday card was a turning point, but your family taking me in and accepting me as part of the family with no qualms also played a role, but you made the biggest difference. You listened, really listened. When we’d talk about books and ideas and beliefs, I was heard and that brought us close together without the walls I had put up to keep people out. I don’t feel alone anymore at all.”

“I used to feel like that song too. Listening to you sing it was, like you said – a blast from the past. I did scream and fall and no one heard, but I’m not alone anymore either. It was a very moving performance. You were incredible.”

“Thank you.” Kurt tilted his head just a bit and raised his eyebrow questioning Sebastian before he moved his hands any lower.

Sebastian kissed him again and nodded.

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Kurt left the bathroom first and got in bed. Sebastian went around to the other side and climbed in.

“You have plans to be the little spoon?”

“I do, but first I want to kiss you.”

“Imagine that,” he teased. “I had the very same idea.”

They met in the middle and spent several minutes kissing just for the pure pleasure of kissing.

“I want to ask you something now. Are you still going to go back to Paris this coming summer?”

“Only if you’re coming. Wait. What are you actually asking?”

“If I get a role here, are you going to go back to Paris? You mentioned graduate school at one point or selling this place and moving back to stay.”

“You’re just asking to be rick-rolled.” He started to sing very quietly.

Never gonna give you.
Never gonna let you down.
Never gonna run around and dessert you.
Never gonna make you cry.
Never gonna say goodbye.
Never gonna tell a lie and hurt you.

Kurt laughed and kissed him again. “That was sweet.”

“But?”

“But is that really what you want? It sweet and comforting, but I don’t want you to make statements like that, even in song for fun, if you don’t mean it.”

Sebastian wrapped his hand around the back of Kurt’s neck and pulled him into a kiss again. “I do mean it. I told you that I can write anywhere. I intend for right here to be the first place I put that statement to the test. If you can get a role when you graduate or soon after, you’ll be able to hack away at the school loans you took out. If we’re going to go back to France at some point to actually live, it would make sense to pay those down as quickly as possible. Things are different. I thought this place was mine and that I could sell it and use that money to set myself up in Paris. And I know that Grandma rescued us from being tossed out by buying it herself and putting my name on the deed, but that doesn’t mean that it is mine to do with as I please like I thought it would when I was under the impression that my father had bought it for me. When I called Isabelle, all I was actually hoping for was that someone could talk him into letting us stay until we graduated. I wasn’t expecting Grandma to force his hand into selling it to her. Anyway, when I first knew that I was in love with you and I was planning and waiting to ask you out on my birthday, I had calculated that even if you owed $100,000 in school loans that it would only be less than 5% of what I was going to get if I sold this place. I didn’t expect you to agree to it, but I had calculated that I could pay off your school debt easily if I sold the place and we moved to France at some point. That’s not the case now. I have to take into consideration the reality of how things are now. Grandma is spoiling us. I have no idea how long that will last. It may be that it’s just a period of assuaging her conscience for not checking up on me the first three years I was here and believing my father.”

“I’m not expecting her to. And you’re right that I don’t want you to just pay my loans off, but if I get to the point where I can’t make the payments, I will let you help me. We said we’d be there for each other. And letting you help me is letting you be there for me.”

“You mean that, right?”

“Yes. We said we wouldn’t lie to each other. If I say something I mean it.”

Sebastian rolled him onto his back and pressed in and kissed him with such passion that it surprised Kurt.

When they broke for air, Kurt asked, “What brought that on? Not that I’m complaining because I’m definitely not.” He kissed him again.

“Just the fact that you’ll let me help and that you trust me. I love you so much. Please stop worrying that I’m going to go back to France and leave you here. Yes, I love it in Paris, but I love you more.”

“Please?” Sebastian asked. “I’ll be quiet.”

It was nearly 1:00am before they were close to falling asleep, but Sebastian was still slowly running his hands along Kurt’s neck, chest, and upper legs caressing him while sprawled out on him like Kurt was his body pillow. Kurt was running his free hand through Sebastian’s hair like he loved so much.

“We need to get some sleep,” Kurt said.

“Mmm hmm.” Sebastian stopped petting Kurt and took his hand and interlaced their fingers.

Within a couple of minutes, Kurt felt Sebastian’s breathing change and he knew he was asleep. Kurt kissed him on top of the head. “Sweet dreams, my love.”

“Those are fun,” Burt said when Kurt came into the dining area in his Star Trek onesie Sunday morning.

“Sebastian got them for us for Halloween. They’re better than robes when it’s cold. They cover everything instead just the top two-thirds.”

Burt smirked.

“What?”

“Nothing. I was young and in love once. If you were wearing pajama pants, your lower half wouldn’t be cold in a robe.”

Kurt rolled his eyes. “Fine. I’m not 30, but I’m not a child.”

“I know. I’m not going to hassle you. It’s none of my business.”

Kurt went into the kitchen. “I don’t have any decaf, but I can make you some tea.”

“Sure. Carole’s gotten me to learn to like it.”

Kurt plugged the kettle in after he filled it with water. He stood near it so he could turn it off before it whistled to keep it from waking Carole or Sebastian.

“You love him don’t you?”

Kurt looked confused. “I told you I did.”

Burt sighed heavily. “I’m so sorry, Kurt. I know you said you forgave me, but I haven’t forgiven myself. There’s still this distance between us. You didn’t feel okay about telling me about your part in the play.”

“That was mostly about Carole. The play is really sad. It’s about gay men in the 80’s. More than one of them has AIDS, including the character I played. It’s one of those plays with a limited cast that plays all of the roles. So, in one scene I was a partially naked prostitute in a park getting fucked.”

Burt looked shocked.
“I made a costume for myself that make it look like I was naked. When the play was on Broadway, the actors were actually naked in some scenes. In the Broadway production, the character I played had full frontal nudity. One of the characters dies from AIDS. It was not the kind of thing that Carole or you would have enjoyed. It’s a poignant look at a terrible time in the lives of gay men, but it’s a rough play to watch.”

“And to be in, I’d imagine.”

“That too. Sebastian helped me so much.”

“Good. He loves you too.”

“I know. He tells me all the time.” Kurt grabbed the kettle and turned it off. He poured the water into the cup with the tea bag. “He doesn’t tell me in a way to make me stop thinking of something hurtful he said or to persuade me to do something I don’t want to or to overlook being stood up or forgetting something that was important to me.”

“Well, that’s good.”

“He’s actually never said anything purposefully hurtful, or tried to get me to do something I didn’t want to do. He’s never stood me up or forgotten something that was important to me, but if he did either of those things he’d apologize sincerely. And when those last two things inevitably happen with us both using public transportation and being so busy, I’ll forgive him. He’s given me no reason to believe that he would hurt me on purpose.” Kurt poured his coffee into a cup and Sebastian’s into his insulated thermos mug since he wasn’t sure when he would wake up. He carried both of them to the table. He went back to work on Burt’s tea. He removed the tea bag, added a little honey, and stirred. He put it on the table in front of Burt.

“Thanks, kiddo.”

“You’re welcome.” He sat down across from Burt.

Sebastian came out a few minutes later and walked up to Kurt’s chair and waited for him to scoot up. He slipped his leg behind Kurt and sat down. He kissed the back of Kurt’s neck, wrapped his arms around him, and propped his chin on Kurt’s shoulder. He reached for his insulated mug and picked it up before his brain engaged and he saw Burt across the table from them. He put his forehead down on Kurt’s shoulder for a second. “I’m sorry. I’ll sit in my own chair.”

Kurt leaned back into him and didn’t let him move.

“Stay where you are, kid. Obviously, this isn’t the first time you’ve sat and drank your coffee together like that.”

“No, but I didn’t mean to embarrass Kurt.”

Carole came out. She smiled and chuckled. “Those are cute and they look really warm.”

“They’re super soft and cozy,” Kurt said. “Sebastian got them for us. There’s still hot water in the kettle for tea and enough coffee for one cup. I didn’t know which you’d prefer.”

She went into the kitchen and poured the coffee into a cup and added some cream from the fridge. She sat down next to Burt.

Kurt continued from where the conversation had left off. “I’m not embarrassed, Bas.”
“My coffee is perfect, like always. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

“What were your plans for the day?” Carole asked.

“The usual,” Kurt said. “Grocery shopping, but this time we were just going to go here in the neighborhood and get a few things to fill in with what we have left so that we don’t leave any food behind for three weeks. We cook on Sundays, speak French, and look for French things to do. Sometimes we go to art exhibits if we can find any that aren’t pricey. A lot of times, we just pick a French movie to watch on Netflix after lunch. And schoolwork in the evening, if we have to.”

“Sounds relaxing,” she said. “Except the homework part.”

“I agree,” Kurt said. “When we don’t have schoolwork, we read books in French for fun. Bas has nearly finished all of the books I got him for his birthday.”

“Kurt’s reading the series too, but he hasn’t caught up yet. I obviously had a head start since they were my books.”

She looked around the room. “This apartment is really nice,” she said. “And Sam’s paintings give it a homey feeling. It’s not that big, but I like the layout.”

“Me too,” Sebastian said. “This room feels open, but it still feels like separate areas, with the half wall. And I love the closet space.”

“Yeah, that was one thing I don’t care for in most of the places I’ve been is the clutter in everyone’s apartments due to the lack of closets. People have shelves everywhere and it just makes the space seem really closed in,” Kurt said. “The closets let us shut the doors and the whole room looks neat and orderly.”

Kurt’s phone started ringing. He got up and went to the bedroom to get it. He answered Adam’s Skype call.

“Hey, Adam.”

“Congratulations! I heard through the grapevine, or maybe that should be the apple-vine that you won the Winter Showcase last night.”

“I did.”

“That’s fantastic! You’re amazing and you deserve it. I’m so happy for you.”

“Thank you.”

“You don’t sound very excited for yourself.”

“It’s just hard to wrap my mind around, but I was pleased with my performance.”

“Well, that’s good. I won’t keep you. Marcus and I are at my parents’ for the day. I just wanted to congratulate you.”

“Tell Marcus ‘hi’ from us. We’ll see you in a few weeks.”

“We’re both excited. It’s been ages since I’ve been to Paris. See you soon!”
Kurt closed the app and went back into the dining room. Sebastian patted the chair and Kurt sat back down where he had been.

“That was Adam calling to congratulate me about winning last night.”

“What was in the envelope?” Carole asked.

“You know, I didn’t actually open it. I’ll go get it.” He left and came right back with a letter opener. He sat down on the front half of the chair again. He slid the letter opener under the wax seal, and then laid it down on the table. He pulled the piece of cardstock out. It was hand done in calligraphy like his invitation. “As the winner of the 2015 NYADA Winter Showcase, your account will be credited the sum of $10,000 towards your tuition for next semester. Please bring this to the Office of the Bursar to adjust your account accordingly.” Kurt sat there, dazed.

“10,000?” Burt asked.

“That’s what it says, Dad. $10,000.”

“Well, that’s wonderful, honey. I want you to take the $10,000 you’ll be reimbursed and pay down one of your loans. Any amount you can pay off before it starts to accrue interest will really cut down on the monthly payments once you start to make them. You get a six-month grace period to start making payments, but the interest starts to accrue during the six months, so it makes sense to pay as much of it off as you can as soon as you can. You just need to make sure you’re paying toward the principal and not just making advanced payments.”

“It sounds complicated. They should offer a seminar the last semester of college to help students know what to do.”

“You could suggest it,” Carole said. “The loans say they have, let’s say a 5% interest rate, but that’s compound interest, not simple interest. By the time you repay what you owe over the allotted 10-year time period, you will pay back nearly 30% of the loan value in interest. So, for $100,000, you’ll pay back nearly $30,000 in interest. So, it’s a win/win to pay it down as much as you can during the first six months. Less interest accruing, plus lower payments on whatever is left.”

“I’ll work on that. I’ll get my loan documents out and look through them carefully. If I can’t figure it out, I’ll get an appointment with Isabelle’s financial advisor.”

“Good plan, honey. It’s criminal how much colleges charge and then to charge so much interest on the loans is so hard on young people just starting out.” She finished her tea. She grabbed both her cup and Burt’s and put them in the dishwasher. “We better start getting ready or at least I will.” She left and went to shower.

Kurt just sat there, leaned back against Sebastian, letting his presence ground him. “I had no idea the winner got so much money.”

Burt said, “Well, I’m glad you did. Like Carole said, pay down one of your loans.”

“I will. I’m going to text Isabelle to see if Grandma Smythe has a plan for after we finish brunch. If it involves going somewhere else, Carole will want to bring other shoes at least.”

“Don’t worry about Carole’s shoes. She brought the expensive comfortable ones that she bought for attending all of those stand-up-for-hours DC events. She paid a small fortune for those, but I’m glad she did because they kept her feet from killing her when we walked from the Metro station to events or just end up standing around for hours on end. I’m going to go wait for her to get out of
the shower.”

“About what you said earlier. That’s all in the past. Let it stay there, please. I just want to move forward from here. Nothing is gained by continuing to go over the mistakes that were made. We just have to stop and think more carefully and do our best to stop making so many as we go forward.”

Burt nodded and walked down to the bedroom.

Kurt got up and turned the other way in the chair and propped his feet on the rungs so he didn’t squash Sebastian. He kissed him. “I love you. You’re not an embarrassment to me. Please never, ever think that. You’re my incredibly sweet, handsome boyfriend who loves me and who I love.” He wrapped his arms around Sebastian’s shoulders and leaned into him. He kissed him gently again.

Sebastian looked content. “I love you too. Let’s go get ready to eat a really fancy brunch at the top of Rockefeller Center. We never ended up going up there because we never considered it worth the cost versus getting into a museum, but now we’ll get to go up and have the swankiest brunch we’ll probably ever have.”

“I’d say. It should be great.” He stood up and Sebastian finished his coffee.

Kurt took his cup and put it in the dishwasher while Sebastian washed his by hand quickly and left it in the dish drain to dry.

Kurt stepped up behind Sebastian while he was looking through his ties to find the one he wanted. He wrapped his arms around him. “Turn around for a second.”

Sebastian turned in his arms. “I’m sorry for whatever it is that I’m doing that’s continuing to give you the impression that I’m embarrassed by you in any way. I’ve been thinking about it for the last ten minutes. I’m obviously still doing something that is giving off some kind of embarrassed vibe. If you can tell me what it is, I will do my very best to stop doing it because in no way am I embarrassed of you or us.”

“I’ve been thinking too. Obviously, I’m reading you wrong, so I’d like to figure out where we’re crossing signals. I think maybe it’s your hesitancy to take up space or be a bother in some way. Like last night, you completely turned it off – the hesitancy. You were articulate when answered and asked questions, and your eye contact and poise were all on point. It was like we were at Vogue. You were in Vogue mode last night. Where being gay is acceptable thing. But other times, you seem so tentative and I guess maybe I just have trouble knowing whether being more physically available to you will make you more or less hesitant or whatever it is.”

“We’ve talked about this before – the fact that there was a Vogue Kurt, a NYADA Kurt, an Ohio Kurt, and a Kurt who was something to someone else. And how I needed to figure out who I am myself. I think this might be one of the last steps of that. There is an ongoing internal fight inside me that says we deserve to hold hands or kiss or whatever anywhere a straight couple can, but my internal response to that is the feeling of hitting lockers at school and being hit in the back of the head with a brick in that alley. I think you’re just feeling that. We’re so close. I think you can just sense my struggle, but you can’t read my mind.” He touched Sebastian’s face to initiate eye contact again. “My struggle isn’t whether I love you because I love you with no hesitation and no reservation. That’s the truth. I never knew that loving someone could be like it is with you.” He kissed him extra gently. “Never, ever think that what you’re sensing is a hesitation about how I
feel about you. It’s not.”

Sebastian nodded.

“Earlier when you sat in the chair with me, I probably tensed, didn’t I?”

“Yeah, a little.”

“That wasn’t because I was hesitant about how I felt about you sitting in the chair with me, it was years of being hesitant to let my dad see me act on my gayness. Being gay was fine in theory, but he didn’t want to see it. You heard him on the phone. When I got upset about it after that incident, he openly admitted that he didn’t know anything about gay sex. He had known I was gay for 14 years, but had never bothered to learn about it. I stomped out and said something about it being okay to be gay as long as I didn’t act on my gayness. He got some pamphlets and read them, and then gave them to me to read. He told me that I mattered and not to throw myself around like I didn’t, and then suggested that I wait until age 30.”

Sebastian chuckled.

“I know. The thing is that he’s always meant well. He’s never intentionally said anything about being gay being wrong. It’s just that he grew up in homophobic Lima too. It was ingrained that being with a guy was disgusting. You sat down behind me like you do a lot of the time. It’s a habit. And it was comforting because you love me and I really like it when we sit like that. The tension came from anticipating a negative response from him, even if it was just a look. You sitting like that with me is in no way platonic. I’m not sure I’m making any sense, but I think the unease you’re picking up on is residual fear from past experiences. I try to keep the past from shaping how I react, but I guess it’s still there more than I had realized.”

“You can assess the situation as well. If you don’t perceive any real danger, then you can initiate more physical contact because touching you relaxes me.”

“So, let me recap what you said and make sure I understand. For example, sometimes on the subway, you tense up when I touch you and I back off. But you don’t want me to unless I’m sensing danger of some sort.”

“Right. What caused me to tense might have been seeing someone who looks like someone who used to shove me into lockers. Or honestly for a while it was seeing someone who reminded me of Blaine, you know back when he was showing up places randomly. It might be someone who reminds me of Finn and when that happens, this flash of excitement flows through me, but before it makes it all the way through, the soul-crushing feeling that it can’t be him hits me like ice water being thrown in my face. It could be the smell of my Aunt Mildred bringing back memories I don’t want to think about. It’s not you. I promise. You’re this really amazing part of my life.” He took both of Sebastian’s hands. “I told you that whenever I see you, I feel better, even if I already felt great. Seeing you unexpectedly makes me break out into a huge smile, not cringe. It’s the best feeling.” He ran his right thumb across Sebastian’s lips. “Please don’t mistake those moments of panic or fear as anything directed at you or caused by you.” He kissed him gently again.

“I won’t anymore. I understand a lot better now.” He wrapped Kurt in his arms. “I feel that way about you too, in case you didn’t know. When I look up and see you looking at me, my heart flutters in a good way and I just feel happy.” He kissed Kurt. “We better hurry up. I’m sure you want to style your hair.” He ran his hands through it.
“Sebastian!” Kurt was laughing, but took off toward the bathroom to fix his hair.

“Being up here with you reminds me of being up at the top of the Eiffel Tower,” Kurt said. He leaned back into Sebastian. “Thank you for telling me that stuff earlier so we could work through it rather than let it fester and get ugly.”

Sebastian hugged him tighter. “I don’t want that, ever. I love you too much to not fight for you.”

Kurt took a few photos before he turned the camera and faced it towards the two of them. He got a couple of decent shots. “Let’s go back inside. It’s freezing out here.” He slipped the camera into his interior coat pocket and buttoned it before reaching for Sebastian’s hand.

They were seated in the restaurant and told about the various dishes being served around the room. They all got up and began to make their way around selecting the foods they wanted. Once everyone was seated again, they started to eat.

Grandma Smythe said, “I think it’s even better than it was the last time I was here.”

“It really is good,” Burt said. “I haven’t tried anything I didn’t like so far.”

Kurt asked Sebastian, “Did you tell anyone about your paper?”

He shook his head.

Kurt smiled and gave his leg and encouraging squeeze.

“I got an A on my senior thesis paper.”

“That’s great, honey,” Carole said.

Isabelle smiled. “I bet it was great. I know you’ve been working on it for months.”

“It was great,” Kurt beamed. “It was really interesting.”

Grandma Smythe asked, “What was your topic?”

“The title is: ‘Do Translated Works Effectively Communicate Meaning or Is Simultaneous Study of the Work in its Original Language within its Historical Context a Requisite Key to Understanding?’”

“What was your conclusion?” she asked.

“Simultaneous study of the work in its original language within its historic context yields the best understanding. Relying only on a translation for important texts leaves out relevant cultural and historical information that could skew the understanding of the meaning. Even with historical documents in their original language, care has to be taken to understand the historical linguistic changes within a language because word meanings can change so significantly over time.”

“How long is this paper, Sebastian,” Carole asked.

“It’s 42 pages long.”

“Oh, wow,” she said. “That’s impressive. I didn’t realize that it was such a big project.”
“I’ve been working on it since last summer. It typically wouldn’t be turned in until spring, but due to my graduating early, there are other courses that I have to take in the spring in order to graduate that weren’t offered over the summer. My thesis advisor was actually my professor for the class I took this summer, so I began work on it then and met with her over the summer each week before we went to France.”

“Do all seniors have to do one?” Carole asked.

“No, but if those who want to graduate with honors or be eligible for awards have to.”

“So, you did it because you wanted to,” Grandma Smythe asked.

“Yes. I want to be a writer. I wrote all the time when I was in France, but I struggled to write anything after I came to the States. Writing papers for my classes was easy. I was given a topic or a selection of topics and the expectations for the outcome were delineated clearly. That’s different than coming up with a topic that’s interesting and doing all of the research independently. It’s still not creative writing like I used to excel at, but it’s writing. I wanted to prove to myself that I can write. And this last semester I also took a creative writing course as an elective to get back into a creative mindset even though the topics were guided. I’ve been writing again and it feels good. I’ve even written some stuff that wasn’t for a class this fall. I feel more like myself than I have in a long time.” He reached under the table and put his hand on Kurt’s leg.

Kurt reached down and put his hand on top of Sebastian’s.

“Good for you,” she said. “It’s about time things started looking up for you. You maybe not be surprised, but quite a few people were. I have retired the annual Smythe Thanksgiving Day festivities. This year was the last year for that. Two of the three people I would have like to have eaten with were upstairs in a bedroom avoiding the rest of the people in my house. There will be no more of that. There are other changes in the works, but nothing is finalized. This will also be the final Christmas Eve luncheon. I couldn’t cancel for this year because the catering and everything had already been planned and while I may not want to be the hostess, I will not back out on a contract I’ve already signed. By the time you all get there, they should all be long gone. Let’s go get more food, I have juicy gossip to share.”

When they all sat back down again, she started to tell her story. They all listened carefully. Grandma Smythe turned out to be a colorful storyteller. She paused her story while they got up to pick out other things to try, and then resumed her story when they started to eat again.

When she finished, Sebastian said, “I could write that out and try to sell it. What did you say her actual name is?”

“Janice Baker.”

“So, Ms. Baker is spending the next three years in the Ohio State Pen?” he said.

“That’s right.”

Kurt turned to Sebastian. “You said she knew how to play your father. It went far beyond just what you saw.”

“Yeah, I guess so. And you fired the accountant at the firm?”

“He’s in jail too for fraud and embezzlement – just like Ms. Baker,” Grandma Smythe responded. “I had my lawyer offer both of them plea deals in return for complete confessions. It avoided lengthy public trials and ensured their incarceration.”
“What a mess,” Burt said.

Grandma Smythe said, “Well, it’s all over now. I just need to find a new accountant. If everyone’s done, we can go ahead and leave. I want to go to FAO Schwartz to see it decorated for the holidays before we go to our next destination.”

After looking around the store, taking photos of each other and getting someone to take a group photo of all of them, they reluctantly left so they weren’t late to where they were going. The town car pulled up to the Richard Rodgers Theater.

“What are we doing?” Kurt asked.

Grandma Smythe answered, “We’re going to see Hamilton, dear. Hop on out.”

Kurt’s eyes went huge. “We’re what?”

Sebastian nudged him. “We’re waiting for you to get out,” he teased.

“Right. Sorry.” He got out first, with Sebastian right behind him. They helped Burt, Carole, Isabelle, and Grandma Smythe out.

Once everyone was out, Grandma Smythe said, “It’s the talk of the town. I just have to see it. Come on.” She looked positively giddy with excitement.

Kurt was rolling up onto his toes while they waited in line to get inside. Sebastian took his hand. Kurt looked over and smiled radiantly. Once they were inside, they checked their coats and found their seats.

Three and a half hours later, Kurt was singing as he unlocked the door to the apartment. Burt and Carole needed to retrieve their stuff before heading out to the airport.

“I wish we could stay longer, kiddo, but with the shop being closed Thursday and Friday, we’ll be busy tomorrow.”

“I understand, Dad. I’m just glad you both came.”

The two of them headed down to the bedroom to get their stuff packed up.

Grandma Smythe handed Kurt an envelope.

“What’s this for?”

“That’s your Christmas gift, dear.”

“You just took us to a musical.”

“Today was my gift to myself. I got to spend the day doing things I enjoy with people who actually want to spend time with me rather than doing so out of obligation.”

Kurt shook his head and smiled. “Only you would come up with an answer like that. Of course, we like to spend time with you. Do you want me to open this now?”
“If you’d like. Don’t wait past tomorrow, if you want to wait until I’m gone. I know that some people don’t like to open presents in front of others.”

Kurt opened the envelope. “No. That’s too much.”

“Sebastian asked for plane tickets to France. You didn’t tell me what you wanted, so I had to play detective, which I admit I actually quite liked. If I had been born male, I think I might have chosen to be a detective. I know you will love that. Don’t be stubborn. Accept gifts with dignity, dear,” she chided teasingly.

“Yes, Grandma. It will be fantastic. I’m sure. Thank you.” He offered her a hug.

“You’re welcome, dear. I’ll see you in a few days.” She stepped back. “Sebastian can walk me back down to the car, dear. Your parents will be out soon, I’m sure.” She headed for the door, with Sebastian close behind since she had insisted on leaving the wheelchair in the car all day.

A few minutes later, Burt and Carole came out with their bags in hand.

Carole asked, “Where are Sebastian and Mrs. Smythe?”

“You know she told you to call her Imogen or Grandma.”

“I’m stubborn. We’ll see.”

Kurt chuckled. “She had Sebastian walk her down already. I’m glad you two came. We’ll see you Wednesday morning.” He hugged each of them.

Burt nodded. “Carole will be there to pick you up. You three can play Top Chef or whatever while I’m at work. I’m going in early, so I’ll get off at 4:00.”

Kurt opened the door and walked with them to the elevator. Sebastian got out as they got in.

“We’ll see you two soon,” Carole said, as the doors shut.

Sebastian opened the apartment door and let Kurt in. “What was in the envelope?”

“Two tickets to *Wicked* for Tuesday evening.”

“That will be fun.”

“If you didn’t know what it was, she had to have gotten the information out of my dad.” Kurt smiled and shook his head. “She took us to the fanciest brunch in town and then to see *Hamilton*. She got you plane tickets to France. I thought that was for both of us. And now she got us both tickets to see *Wicked*. She’s too much.”

“That may be true, but she’s having fun. Who are we to tell her what to do with her money? She ran that law firm for 50 years. If all of the rich people hoard their money, it doesn’t really benefit the economy.”

“Fine, you win. I’ll be gracious, like she said. And Tuesday night, I’ll be wicked.” He laughed. “That means we need to do our shopping tomorrow and our packing. We won’t have time after we get back Tuesday evening.” He stepped toward Sebastian and took his hand and put his other hand on Sebastian’s shoulder and began to sing.
I've decided to make you my new project.
Whenever I see someone less fortunate than I.
And let’s face it, who isn’t less fortunate than I?
My tender heart tends to start to bleed.
And when someone needs a makeover,
I simply have to take over!
I know, I know exactly what they need.

He paused.

“I’m assuming this is from Wicked.”

Kurt nodded and continued to act out Glinda’s part.

And even in your case,
Though it’s the toughest case I’ve yet to face,
Don’t worry. I’m determined to succeed.
Follow my lead,
And you will be…

Popular.
You’re gonna be popular.
I’ll teach you the proper poise when you talk to boys,
Little ways to flirt and flounce. Oh!
I’ll show you what shoes to wear,
How to fix your hair,
Everything that really counts to be…

Popular.
I’ll help you be popular.
You’ll hang with the right cohorts.
You’ll be good at sports.
Know the slang you’ve go to know.
So, let’s start because you’ve got an awfully long way to go.

He kissed Sebastian on the cheek and flounced down to their bedroom. Sebastian laughed, made sure the door was locked, and followed him.

Kurt was dancing around humming the same song and getting undressed. He hung up his slacks, suit coat, and tie. He threw the shirt in the laundry. Sebastian did the same with his clothes. Kurt danced over to the bathroom and headed inside. He turned the water on and got in the shower. Sebastian was only a few steps behind. Kurt kept humming singing lines here and there, while he bathed Sebastian. He washed himself while Sebastian washed his hair. He rinsed quickly, and then pinned Sebastian to the shower wall and began kissing him.

“Sit on the bed and close your eyes until I say to open them.” Kurt shut the door to their bedroom and locked it. He connected his phone to the speaker and pulled up the music. He took a pair of boxer briefs and the coveralls out and put them on. “When the music starts you can open your eyes.” The last thing he did was to turn the little heater on after he flipped the switch for the rope lights on under the bed to light the room up.

He pressed play and got into position before the music started. He sang a medley of his own
making combining parts of “My Pony” and “Ride” doing the choreography from “Ride” with all of the hip isolations and drops and body rolls and adapting it to fit the rest of the song. The end of the medley included him stripping down to the boxer briefs and dancing to the chorus of “Ride”.

Sebastian was out of the bed before he finished with his hands running down Kurt’s torso. “Oh, God. That was … there are no words. You are so hot.” He started kissing him as soon as the music stopped. “Was that an invitation for me to choose or an offer of both? Am I riding or are you? Your medley was giving me mixed messages.”

“Both, either or. Whatever you want. I’m all yours.”

“Is this my gift?”

“The dance was. I created the whole thing just for you.” Kurt kissed him. “I was already yours. You know that.” Kurt walked him back towards the bed until he hit the back of his knees and sat down. Kurt straddled his lap. “I love you.” He resumed the kissing and leaned forward enough to push Sebastian onto his back. “If you’re too tired, you can have a raincheck. I might even be persuaded to do the dance for you again.”

He wrapped his arms around Kurt. “I love you too and I’m not too tired. Any tiredness I had went out the window about two measures into the song.”

Kurt laughed and kissed down his neck. “Scoot up in the bed.”

Two hours later, they were in the kitchen freshly showered and wearing their onesies. Sebastian was hanging onto Kurt’s back like a baby bear.

“How about leftover buffet?” Kurt asked. “We warm up everything in the fridge that gets eaten warm and we eat it, along with whatever other cold stuff is left, if anything.”

“Sounds good to me, except that I have to let go of you to do it.” He kissed the back of his neck.

Kurt turned in his arms and kissed him on the lips. “I know, but we need to keep our stamina up.” Kurt winked. “The brunch was huge, but that was like 10 hours ago.”

“Good point.” But he didn’t let go of Kurt.

“You’re very snuggly. Do you just want to go to bed and snuggle and get up early and eat the leftovers for breakfast?” Kurt ran his hand through Sebastian’s hair. “We won’t starve overnight. Or we can go lie on the couch, all snuggled up, and watch a movie until we get hungry enough to be willing to warm the food up.”

“I really just want to go back and get in bed with you and snuggle.”

“Okay.” He turned the kitchen light off and walked back to the bedroom with him. Kurt closed the door behind them lay down on the bed. “When the washer buzzes, I’ll move the sheets to the dryer.”

Sebastian snuggled up to Kurt and laid his head on Kurt’s chest. He raised his head back up a few seconds later. He unzipped Kurt’s onesie so that he could lay his face on Kurt’s skin. He slipped his hand inside the onesie and caressed Kurt’s side gently without tickling him. Kurt kissed the top of his head and ran his hand through Sebastian’s hair.
“How did you have time to make a medley, record music for it, and learn or choreograph the dance?”

“Well, I didn’t just start working on it last week. I’ve been working on it since I brought the coveralls back. I worked on the dance mostly last week when yoga and stage combat club didn’t meet and you stayed home to study. I used one of the music practice rooms.”

“Well, your very sexy self in those coveralls, dancing for me was so hot.”

Kurt kissed him on the top of his head again. “You make me feel sexy, which is something I have never, ever considered I would ever feel. Thank you.”

“For telling the truth? You’re welcome, I suppose. You are very sexy.” He tipped his head back and moved his hand from Kurt’s side to his jaw, tilted his head, and kissed him. “And very kissable.”

They lay there kissing back and forth until the washer buzzed. Kurt got up, moved the sheets, and turned the dryer on. He went back in their bedroom and pecked Sebastian on the lips.

“I’m going to warm up the food. I’ll come get you when it’s ready.” He leaned over to kiss Sebastian again and was caught by surprise.

“Snuggle me.” Sebastian wrapped his arms around Kurt and pulled him back into the bed.

Kurt repositioned himself and held Sebastian again. It dawned on him what might be causing Sebastian to be so clingy. He ran his fingers through his hair and kissed him on the forehead. “I love you, mon abri. I’m here for you and I’ll snuggle you all you want.”

They fell asleep snuggled up. The dryer buzzing woke them up. Kurt went to get the sheets. Sebastian managed to wake up enough to help Kurt make the bed. He took his onesie off, hooked it on the door, and got right back in the bed. Kurt started to leave the room.

“I already double-checked the door earlier.”

Kurt turned the alcove light off and closed the door back. He hung his onesie up too. The little heater was still on, so he turned it off. “Do you want me to turn the rope lights off?”

“Yeah.”

Kurt flipped the switched and slipped under the covers. As soon as he was in his spot, Sebastian curled right back up on him and fell back asleep quickly.

Sebastian woke up still in Kurt’s arms.

“Good morning, beautiful.” Kurt kissed him on the forehead.

Sebastian tipped his head up and pecked Kurt on the lips. “Good morning, gorgeous. Do we have to get up?”

“Not yet.”

“Mmm, good.” He ran his hand along Kurt’s side. “I just want to snuggle and talk.”

“Sure.” Kurt rotated onto his side, but left his arm extended, so he could bend it and play with the
back of Sebastian’s hair. He wrapped his leg over Sebastian’s and intertwined them. He put his left hand on Sebastian’s hip and gently ran his thumb over his hipbone, caressing him.

“I just want to make sure you that you don’t think you have to do what you did last night in order for me to find you attractive and sexy.” He pecked Kurt on the lips. “I guess the best analogy I can think of right now is that last night was like when you have a fancy dessert. Sometimes in order to eat a huge fancy dessert, you have to forego eating some of the meal you would have eaten in order to have room for it. But if you ate the fancy dessert every day, your overall health would suffer for it because you’d be missing out on the regular daily nutrition you need from the meals you’d normally eat.”

“Okay.”

“I love our life together. I’m not missing anything. I love when you tell me to sit on the counter while you make me an egg and cheese sandwich with lemonade when we’re both just tired and want to eat quickly. I don’t need a dessert that takes five hours to make to know that you love me. That’s not to say that I won’t enjoy every bite of the 5-hour dessert. It just means that I enjoy every bite of the egg sandwiches too. Am I making any sense?”

“You enjoyed my performance, but you want me to know that you like our regular everyday snuggles just as much, even if they aren’t as erotic?”

“Because these times, like right now, I can’t get that anywhere else. No one loves me like you do. I could go to a club and watch some guy cage dance or strip or whatever and it would be erotic and it would make me feel horny, but even if I went home with that guy and he performed just for me, and then he and I did what you and I did, it would never make me feel the way I do when you hold me like this.”

“So, you’re saying you’d rather have a homemade egg and cheese sandwich and lemonade with me than an $8 slice of gourmet store-bought lemon cheesecake.”

“I would. Every day. Now, if you decide to make me a cheesecake, I will gladly eat it. But your egg sandwiches are sexy too. The ingredients aren’t all that different – wheat, milk turned into a cheese of some sort, eggs, lemons, honey or sugar…”

“I get it. So, I’m guessing the coveralls and the sexy dance weren’t the turn on I thought they would be.”

“Hey, look at me.” He waited for Kurt to meet his gaze. “That’s not what I meant exactly. But yes and no. Yes, it was a huge turn on, but no it wasn’t because of the coveralls. You could have been wearing anything and had the same effect on me. I would have been completely turned on because I love you, and God you were hot dancing like that just for me.” He kissed Kurt gently. “But I realized something about the coveralls. I didn’t need you to do something sexy in them. They’re just this visual reminder of this other side of you that can take care of me and handle things I can’t. Knowledge and skill combined with the ability to use those skills under pressure is sexy as hell. You changing the tire that night on the side of a rural highway in the dark – that was a huge turn on. Well, when you pulled off, you saw how my body had reacted. Seeing you take charge and use your knowledge and skills is a huge turn on and I think the coveralls are just sort of a tangible representation of that. You owning your amazingness is hot as hell.”

“I see. At least I think I see. So, if I do the dance for you again in the future, at your request, the coveralls don’t need to be part of the performance.”

“Nope.”
“You know what I liked about the tire changing scenario?”

“I honestly can’t think of a single thing about that scenario that you would have liked.”

“The fact that you stood there and did what I asked without questioning me, without attempting to give me advice or input, or criticizing me. It was the very fact that you just trusted me to do it – that you had faith in me to do it right. You got back in the car and believed that we would be fine. That was huge for me.”

“I do trust you and believe in you.”

“I know and I knew then, but it was like this absolute proof. There’s an expression ‘when the rubber meets the road’ – that night the expression was both a metaphor and reality. Your trust in me remained intact when the rubber met the road. It wasn’t just hypothetical anymore. It was real and steadfast.”

“That word reminds me of something. Yesterday, you bragged about my paper to everyone.”

“I did. It was a good paper and they needed to know how hard you work and that you’re successful too. Just because your department doesn’t do a Winter Showcase doesn’t make your work less amazing.”

“I’ve been working on writing poems in English, just for the sake of practicing rhyme schemes and ideas. We decided not to buy each other gifts and you made up that dance and sang for me. I wrote you a poem. I’m not the next Keats or Longfellow, but hopefully you’ll like it anyway.” He rolled onto his back and sat up. He skittered into their study and came back with a notebook and slipped back under the covers. He turned to the page he wanted Kurt to read, and then handed him the notebook.

Steadfast and true
Is my love for you
No need to swallow my pride
I have no reason to hide
When I look into your eyes
My heart soars to the skies
Sometimes pale and gray
With thoughts far away
Sometimes blue, with flecks of green
Never like any others I’ve seen
Boring through to the very depths of my soul
On which loneliness had taken its toll
You hold me close and listen with your heart
Though we had been worlds apart
The thought of facing the future with you
Is more than enough to carry me through
Hardships, inevitable as they may be
We’ll face them together, you and me

Kurt reached for his phone.

“What are you doing?”

“I was going to take a picture of it so I could read it again. I won’t if you don’t want me to.”
“You really like it?”

“Yes. You wrote me a love poem. Can I take a picture of it?”

“Yes.”

Sebastian helped steady the notebook while Kurt positioned the camera to get a clear shot of the whole poem. He put his phone back on the side table. He put the notebook on the side table as well and rolled over to face Sebastian.

“It’s beautiful, like you. I love you. Thank you. It’s perfect.”

“It’s not perfect.”

“What did Grandma say to me yesterday? ‘Learn to accept gifts graciously, dear.’ The same thing applies here. You gave me a gift and I said it’s perfect. You need to accept my answer graciously. You gave it to me. And if I think it’s perfect, that’s what counts. Is it not?”

“It is. I love you too.”

“The dance isn’t your only gift because I really don’t want you to turn progressively more red as people ask you what I got you for Christmas…”

“Yeah, I’ll be keeping that gift to myself.” He kissed Kurt.

“So, your other gift is that I tailored all of your dress shirts to fit you better. I know that you don’t like your collars tight and so you’ve bought or brought home shirts from the Vault that are too big, so that the necks wouldn’t bother you.”

“You noticed that?”

“I did. I noticed back when we first met. You always had your uniform on, except that once. And you never had your tie done up right unless you were performing. I’m assuming you fastened the top button and wore it properly in class or you would have gotten in trouble like I did for not wearing the uniform properly.”

“What did you do?”

“I tried to accessorize it.”

“Of course you did.” He pecked Kurt.

“Uniformity isn’t really my thing.”

“You don’t say,” Sebastian teased back.

Kurt rolled his eyes. “Anyway, I tailored all of your dress shirts to fit your long, lean, muscled self and not annoy you for being too tight around the neck.”

“I didn’t even notice yesterday. I’m sorry.”

“I was distracting you yesterday. I’m not sure that you had a chance to notice. I started a serious conversation with you while you were getting dressed.”

“That’s true, but I’m glad we had that conversation.”
“I’m glad we have all of our conversations. I always learn something new about you.”

“Thank you for tailoring my shirts. I’m sure they will look much better on me now. I’ll look at them when we get up. I’m going to pack a couple of them for our trip. I’m not sure what anyone’s plans are, but I thought we’d take a pair of slacks each and a couple of dress shirts and a tie or two just to be sure. It’s one thing to buy a t-shirt or something, but to actually buy dress clothes when we both have more than we need already doesn’t make any sense.”

“You’re right. I was going to ask you what we should take. We need to get anything washed that we’re taking.”

“I figured we’d actually take one suitcase this time. Winter clothes take up a lot more space than summer clothes. If we take a day or two trip somewhere, we can put what we need in our backpacks.”

“Sure.” Kurt was still running his hands through Sebastian’s hair.

“I have one more gift for you too, but you’ll have to wait.”

“Okay. I want to snuggle more, but let me go start a load of our wash-and-dries, so we have stuff ready to pack for later.”

Kurt ran off and started the load. After he shut the door, he turned the little heater on, opened his night stand, pulled a couple of things out, put them under his pillow, and went back around the bed. Sebastian came out of the bathroom and got back in bed just as Kurt came around the end of the bed. Kurt went in quickly, did what he needed to, and brushed his teeth. He climbed back into bed as well. He scooted up to Sebastian and kissed him with a feather light kiss, which made him smile and he returned it. They kissed back and forth until Kurt pressed in and kissed him passionately. Kurt rolled him back and started kissing down his neck.

“Will you, please?” He pulled what was under his pillow out and put it in Sebastian’s hand.

Sebastian flipped their positions and opened the bottle of massage oil and put a very tiny bit of it on his hands and began to massage Kurt interspersed with kissing him.

“You can mark me if you want – just not where it will show with clothes on. No stage combat.”

Sebastian was standing at the table folding clothes, while Kurt warmed up all of the leftovers from the fridge.

“We have four eggs for breakfast tomorrow. I’ll be sure to leave four pieces of bread and two slices of cheese. We’re still going out dancing tonight, right?”

“I hope so.”

“We could splurge and order appetizers like we did the first time we went.”

“Sure.”

“That just leaves us with needing something for lunch tomorrow. If you come with me to work early, I’m sure there will be plenty of food from the holiday lunch.”

“I can do that. We can get slices of pizza down near the theater tomorrow evening. It will even out
with the rabbit food we’ll eat for lunch.”

“Deal.” He got plates down and began to divide up what he had heated up onto the plates. He put the rice in the center and all of the other things around it.

Sebastian put their laundry away and came back. Kurt sat their plates down and went back to grab utensils. He turned back around and was face to face with Sebastian, who kissed him.

Kurt said, “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For being you. You’re a very generous lover.”

“Well, it was entirely my pleasure.”

“Not entirely. There was all the pleasure I was receiving.” He kissed him again. He lifted up the edge of his shirt and looked down. “I have a heart-shaped hickey on me.”

“You do. And so do I.”

“It’s my very first one.”

“Mine too.” Sebastian kissed him again, and then stepped back. “Let’s eat while the food’s hot. We can still talk.”

They sat down at the table and started to eat.

“You even make leftovers looks nice,” Sebastian said, as he put a bite in his mouth.

They ate for a few minutes before either of them said anything else.

“We need to get to that game shop this morning, or you can go while I’m at work.”

“I’ll go with you when you leave, and then take the Metro out to the shop to get both games. That way we can spend more time here getting stuff ready to go.”

“We can take the measuring cups and spoons with us if we take a suitcase. That will make baking easier. I never considered the conversion issue we had.”

“Good point. I’ll just buy some inexpensive stainless ones when I’m out getting the games. We can just leave them at Aunt Celeste’s place.”

Kurt sat quietly, contemplating something. He started counting on his fingers. “We weren’t supposed to get gifts for your 17 cousins, 12 aunts and uncles, and 6 great aunts and uncles, were we? I know they delayed their Christmas celebration by a day so we could be part of it. I just don’t want to be blindsided with stacks of gifts and have nothing to give them in return.”

“Not that I know of, but that doesn’t mean that they won’t have gotten us something. I don’t think it would be anything big if they did. If any of them do, I would guess it would be some type of experience-based gift. Like tickets to do something with them. Or maybe just an offer to do something with us since the two of us and most of my cousins are young enough not to have to pay to get into places like museums. I think we’re fine.”

“Okay.” Kurt dropped it. “We need to see if we have the spices for the recipes we sent Carole. If not, you’ll need to get those too.”
“We’ll check before we leave.”

They both finished and put their plates in the dishwasher.

“Why don’t you blow your hair dry, so you can try on the shirts I tailored and not get the collars wet.”

“I’ll do that.”

Kurt was looking through their closet when Sebastian came out of the bathroom. Kurt handed him a shirt to try.

“I don’t have a shirt that looks like this.”

“You do now. I took it from the Vault, and then I tailored it. I think the deep green will look fantastic with your beautiful eyes.”

Sebastian took it off the hanger and tried it on. He tucked it into his jeans so Kurt could see how it fit. “So?” He turned, showing Kurt the view from all sides.

“I was right. The shirt looks fantastic on you, and it fits perfectly. But do you like it?”

Sebastian looked in the mirror. “I do. I think I’ll take this one with us and wear it for our Christmas get-together. It’s not too fancy to wear with jeans, but I could wear it with slacks as well.” He took it off, buttoned it, folded it, and placed it on the bed.

They continued to pull out everything they were going to take and packed their backpacks and the small suitcase they had decided to take.

“I think that’s it, except the stuff you’re getting this afternoon and we’ll need to put our dress shoes in when we come back tonight. I want to go dancing while we’re there.”

“Dancing with you always sounds like a good time.” Sebastian took his hands and started waltzing around the room.

“That’s because it always is. But we need to get going so I’m not late for work. Let’s move these to the other bed and get going.”

Sebastian surprised Kurt by dipping himself, making Kurt laugh. He pulled himself back up. “I love to hear you laugh.” He kissed him and let go of him. He turned and grabbed the suitcase and carried it flat into the other room, and went back for his backpack.

Kurt put his backpack in the other room, and then went in the kitchen to check for the spices. Sebastian came up behind him, wrapped his arms around him, and propped his chin on his shoulder.

“Do we need to stop and get anything?”

“Nope. We’re good.”

He kissed the side of his neck. “We are good.” He squeezed him gently before he let go.

They put their coats on and Sebastian grabbed his school backpack and they headed to the subway.

Once they were outside, he said, “We need to defrost those cookies tonight so we can take them down at some point tomorrow.”
“You’re right.” Sebastian reached out for Kurt’s hand and took it. “Thank you for tailoring all of my shirts.”

“You’re welcome. They should be more comfortable now.”

It was noisy and crowded in the Metro station so they gave up talking until they left the station again.

Sebastian kissed him and said, “I’ll meet you when you get off and we can go back home together.” He waved as he headed back to take the subway to the game store.

As soon as Sebastian stepped into Kurt’s office with a really sheepish look on his face and said, “I’m sorry, but I’m not.”

“What for?”

“We agreed not to buy anything for Christmas, and then I did.”

Kurt laughed at him. “What did you buy?”

“You’re not mad?”

“Of course not. It must be something worth getting for you to go against your own suggestion, and I might have a tiny confession of my own.”

“And what’s that?” he smirked.

“I had already gotten you something when you said not to.”

Sebastian laughed. He leaned over Kurt’s desk and kissed him.

Isabelle walked in the office and chided Sebastian teasingly. “I am not paying him to kiss you, Sebastian.”

“Technically it’s 3:03, so you aren’t paying him at all.”

She rolled her eyes. “I wanted him to stay until 4:00, but he said… What was it exactly? … Oh, yeah. He said, ‘I can’t because my amazing boyfriend is picking me up at 3:00.’”

Sebastian moved behind the desk and put his hand on Kurt’s shoulder. “Good for him.”

Kurt reached up and put his hand over Sebastian’s. “He’s taking me out dancing.”

She said, “You go out dancing every Monday.”

“That just proves that I was right about him being amazing,” Kurt sassed back. He stood up and grabbed his coat. “We’ll see you tomorrow at lunch.”

When they got outside, Kurt said, “I’m actually really hungry already. What if we go back to that place we went to that had the Peruvian Asian fusion food? That was really good and not expensive.”

“That actually sounds really good. I got both of the games.”
“Excellent.”

When they got back from the club, they were still wound up and started dancing around after they hung their coats up. Kurt danced them over to the refrigerator and opened it to remove the bag of frozen cookies and put them on the counter to thaw.

“Enough silliness for a little bit. Let’s get those measuring cups and spoons, the games, and our shoes in the suitcase. Once that’s done, I’ll be ready for more silliness.” Kurt grabbed his shoes and Sebastian’s and took them to the spare room.

Sebastian pulled the bag out with the kitchen stuff in it. Kurt scurried to the kitchen and back, bringing some paper towels.

“I’m going to wrap them. I don’t want them banging around, making security think that dumping our suitcase is a good idea.” Once they were wrapped he wedged them in.

Sebastian had pulled the games out and they were wrapped.

“Nice,” Kurt said. “That will save time.”

Sebastian fit them in. He put the lid down on the suitcase and put the shoes on top. “They need to air out.”

Kurt saw one more wrapped item. “Is that mine?”

“It is. We’ll trade. Bring mine out to the living room.” He went to sit on the sofa. He turned the light off and their little tree on before sat down.

Kurt came in with his hands behind his back. “I didn’t wrap it yet.”

“That’s okay. I’ll close my eyes.”

Kurt sat right next to him and waited for him to put his hands out. When he did, Kurt put the object in his hands.

Sebastian didn’t open his eyes, but started laughing. “It’s a book.” He opened his eyes. “Oh, it’s the most recent book that wasn’t out on my birthday. Thank you.” He handed Kurt’s present to him.

Kurt unwrapped it. “Oh, wow. The Hamilton soundtrack.”

“I decided to pass some of the time I had leftover after getting the games in a used music store. They were trying to encourage last-minute Christmas purchases by offering half-off one item under $20. I was actually really surprised to see the CD in there. I really liked the musical.”

“I did too.” He leaned into Sebastian and kissed him on the cheek. “Thank you. If we go shower now, we could read for a few hours before we go to bed. And we can transfer the CDs to iTunes and listen to it on the plane.”

Sebastian popped up and took off for the bathroom. Kurt laughed and followed Sebastian to the shower.
The next morning Kurt was awakened by Sebastian kissing his shoulder.

"Hmm? You don’t usually wake up first. Did I oversleep somehow? Good morning though."

"You didn’t oversleep. I just woke up early. I wasn’t really trying to wake you up. I’m sorry. Your shoulder was just looking very kissable."

Kurt smiled. “You’re adorable. Feel free to keep kissing my shoulder or my anything else.” Kurt wiggled a little and scooted back into Sebastian’s chest.

Sebastian ran his finger along Kurt’s jaw. “You didn’t shave yesterday.”

“You said you might like to see me in a beard and I told you that I’d grow it out over winter break, but I can start after Christmas if you’d rather.”

“Leave it.”

“What about the chest hair? I usually stay clean shaven for school.”

“Leave it too. Let’s see the au naturel version.”

“So, you don’t want me to wear make up either?”

“You mean covering over your adorable freckles? I like them.”

“I feel like I looked less like a little kid with them covered.”

“Little kids can’t grow beards.”

“This is true. I’ll forego the make up, but I draw the line at the moisturizer.”

“I like you soft.” He ran his hand along Kurt’s arm. “That massage oil seems to do a good job on the rest of you.” He kissed Kurt’s shoulder again.

“Yes, I’m definitely moisturized in places I hadn’t been before.”

Sebastian laughed. “Me too. Did you actually have a plan for this morning?”

“I did. It includes a few options.”

“Let’s hear them.”

“Lie in bed and snuggle. Lie on the sofa and read. Lie on the sofa and snuggle.”

“Those are the three options?”

“Well, I’m open to suggestions. We don’t have to leave until 10:45.”

“Well, I choose the third option with an addition. We didn’t watch a movie Sunday afternoon.”

They dropped the cookies off to the security staff on their way to Vogue. They stepped out the door and nearly tripped over Rachel.

“Rachel?”
“Merry Christmas. I wanted to see if you wanted to get coffee. My treat.”

“Well, we could stop in the Copper Cup and drink it while we walk.”

“Okay.”

“Happy Hanukkah to you.” He offered her a hug, which she accepted. “It’s been ages since I’ve heard from you.”

“I heard through the grapevine. I was hoping you were home so I could take you out to celebrate winning the Winter Showcase. I haven’t contacted you because I told you that I didn’t apologize as a way to force myself back into your life.”

“I appreciate you keeping your word.”

“Someone told me what you sang, but I think they didn’t tell me the right title or I’m not familiar with the song that you sang. Sing it for me?”

“It’s called ‘Waving Through a Window’ from Dear Evan Hansen. I’ll sing the chorus.” He started to sing.

When he finished, she said, “I’ll have to look it up. It’s not being performed here in New York, right?”

“It opened in Washington, DC. You can find recordings on YouTube.”

Kurt opened the door and let Rachel and Sebastian walk through. All of them got in line and ordered. Rachel paid for everyone.

When they were back outside, Sebastian said, “Thank you, Rachel. You didn’t need to pay for mine. I didn’t win any competitions.”

“You’re welcome. Are you two staying here for the break?”

Kurt leaned in closer, and spoke as quietly as possible. “We’re going to Ohio and then to France to spend the break with family.”

“Well, that sounds exciting.”

Sebastian said, “We’re looking forward to it. I know you can’t leave. Any relatives coming in for the holidays?”

“My dads. Not the same week of course, but it will be nice to see both of them.”

“Look, Rachel, you’ve kept your word for the last year. You seem to have actually learned from the past. I just need to ask you something. Are you aware of the fact that Sebastian and I are actually a couple now?”

“Yes. I saw it back in late July or early August, whenever it was that you changed your Facebook status.”

“And you’re okay with that? You’re not going to try to persuade me that I should break up with him, are you?”

“No. He’s obviously changed or you wouldn’t still be living with him 13 months after you moved in with him and you wouldn’t be dating him.”
“He’s actually just gone back to being himself. The Sebastian we knew in high school wasn’t who he really was.”

“You can tell me to mind my own business, but what do you mean?”

“This stays between us.” He briefly told her about his mother’s death, his jealousy of Kurt, and how Dave’s suicide attempt knocked some sense into him.

When he finished, she said, “I’m sorry for your loss.”

He nodded.

“To answer your question, Kurt, I’m not going to say anything about your personal life. You seem happier than I’ve seen you in a really long time, maybe ever.”

They had reached the subway station. They stopped before they went down.

“Text me after break if you’re willing to give me a chance to be a real friend. I hope you two have a great time.”

He hugged her briefly. “Thank you. And thanks for coming by.”

She smiled and waved as they headed down the stairs.

Kurt was still humming when came in the door. He hung his coat up and carried his shoes to their closet. Sebastian was close behind. Kurt was still humming and singing bits and pieces when they got in the shower.

“I know I’ve already said it a dozen times, but I had so much fun.”

“It was fun. And I think you sing the songs every bit as good as the two leads do.”

“You’re biased.”

“Maybe, but that doesn’t make me wrong.” Sebastian kissed him.
Chapter 37

Carole was standing on the sidewalk next to her car when Kurt and Sebastian came out of the airport. Kurt waved when he saw her. She opened the trunk and they put their bags in. She hugged both of them before she got back in the car. They got in quickly and moved out of the passenger pick-up area.

“Good morning. How was your flight?”

“Shorter than the drive,” Kurt said. “With having to arrive so early for flights, we were in the airport longer than we were in the plane.”

“We dealt with that a lot when we were going back and forth to DC all the time.”

“We left home a little before 5:00,” Kurt said.

“Sounds like our first venture in the kitchen needs to be a second breakfast.”

Sebastian teased, “We’re both far too tall to be hobbits.”

She laughed.

He added, “Breakfast actually sounds really good. Neither one of us actually ate breakfast. We did have some coffee at the airport and we ate a cereal bar, but that was more of a morning snack than a breakfast.”

“Well, I have a well-stocked kitchen for our ‘Top Chef’ adventures, as Burt was calling it. I pulled out some of the recipes that I’ve saved up over the years thinking that they sounded good, but I never got around to actually making.”

“Sounds fun,” Kurt said.

“So tell me about Wicked.”

They took their bags to the guest room. They pulled out their clothes for the next day and hung them in the closet. Sebastian took the game out of the suitcase and put the suitcase in the closet with their bags. He turned back around and Kurt was standing there waiting for him. He reached out for Sebastian and took both of his hands. He wrapped Sebastian’s arms around him and wrapped his own around Sebastian’s neck, and then kissed him gently.

“Ready?”

“One more kiss.” Sebastian kissed him. “Okay, let’s go cook.”

They found Carole in the kitchen plating scrambled eggs. She handed each of them a plate with the eggs and two slices of toast on it.

“Orange juice, milk, or more coffee?”

“Orange juice, please,” Sebastian said.

“For me too, but I can get it. Thanks for making us breakfast.” Kurt sat his plate down on the
counter, grabbed two small glasses from the cabinet, and poured orange juice in them. “Do you want some too, or should I put it in the fridge?”

“I’ve had some, but thanks.”

Sebastian picked his glass up and sat down at the island. Kurt followed him. Carole brought over a small stack of recipes that had been cut out of magazines and laid them on the island so Kurt and Sebastian could look through them. They ate and looked through them.

“Southwest cornbread sounds good,” Kurt said. “I’ve never made tortilla soup. Let’s make that too. If we like it, we can add it to our soup repertoire.”

“This flan recipe is really close to the recipe I have for the French custard. How about this recipe for spiced nut crust pumpkin pie? That sounds different than anything I’ve ever tried and it looks easy. We could eat half of it tonight and take the other half with us tomorrow to Grandma’s.”

“In all my years, I’ve never tried artichokes, so I bought two bags of frozen ones to try this recipe. I figured with bacon, butter, and garlic, it can’t be too bad.”

Kurt smiled. “I love artichokes and this looks pretty close to the way I make them. I think you’ll like them.”

“Let’s start with the tortilla soup and the southwest cornbread for lunch. I used this recipe to make a marinade that I put chicken chunks in last night. I thought we could grill those with some red peppers and onions, make the artichokes, and we need something else for dinner because I was going to bake sweet potatoes, but I really do want to try that pumpkin pie, so we need something else for dinner.”

“What you have planned sounds good. What about this one?” Kurt suggested. “It’s a twist on potatoes au gratin.”

She picked it up and read through it. “That works for me. Tomorrow for lunch, I was thinking that French soup you brought the spices for, homemade French bread that you two are going to teach me how to make, and we can make the French custard. I have all of the ingredients for everything.”

“Okay,” Sebastian said. “We’ll take half the pumpkin pie with us and what else?”

“I was thinking those long skinny green beans in this recipe,” she said. “I could parboil them and have the rest of what we need in a bowl, and then just stir-fry them really quickly after we get there. So, we’d follow the recipe, but just there would just be a time gap between the two cooking methods. What about that fried rice recipe? That would go with the green beans. Maybe a coleslaw of some sort?”

“You’ve got a recipe for that in this stack,” Kurt said. “I know I saw one.” He picked them up and found it. “There. How about that?”

She nodded. “Sure. Mrs. Smythe said she was having a ham, mashed potatoes, and a broccoli casserole made.”

Kurt said, “Sounds like plenty then.”

“Except, I want to make those mini cheese muffins.” She looked through the recipes again. “This one.”
“I think if we make muffins, we probably don’t need the rice since she’s already serving potatoes.”

Carole said, “That’s true, so no rice.”

Sebastian said, “So we’ll have ham, mashed potatoes, broccoli casserole, green beans, coleslaw, and mini cheese muffins with pumpkin pie for dessert?”

“We need a second dessert, I think,” Carole said. “What if Mrs. Smythe doesn’t like pumpkin pie?”

“We can take the leftover custard from lunch with us?” Kurt suggested.

“Good idea,” Carole said. “So, then I think we’re set.” She collected up the recipes that hadn’t been chosen and put them back in her recipe box.

“And you know that she told you to call her Imogen or Grandma.”

“I know, but it doesn’t mean that I can bring myself to do it.”

Kurt remained steadfast. “She’s 88. She knows what she wants to be called.”

“Fine. I’ll just do my best to never say her name.”

Kurt rolled his eyes.

Kurt and Sebastian put their dishes in the dishwasher and washed their hands. They all grabbed aprons, got busy prepping everything they needed, and then started to cook.

Burt came home at 2:00. The other three were about halfway through lunch.

“Burt, honey, we’re in the dining room. Grab a bowl and a plate, and then come eat lunch with us.”

He hung his coat up and washed his hands. “It sure smells good in here.” He grabbed what he needed and went into the dining room. “What is this?” he asked, as he ladled some of the tortilla soup into his bowl. He put some of the cornbread on his plate and sat next to Carole.

“It’s tortilla soup and southwest cornbread,” she answered.

He took a bite of the soup. “That’s good. I like it.” He tried the cornbread. “That’s got a little heat to it, but it’s good.” He continued to eat.

“You’re home early, Dad. I thought you said you were getting off at 4:00.”

“I left early. It’s fine. They’ll call if something comes up. They understood that I don’t get to see you two much. I smell something else. Pumpkin pie?”

“Good guess, Dad. Carole had a recipe for one she wanted to try. It will be dessert for dinner. It’s in the oven right now.”

“Mmm. I love pumpkin pie.”

“This one has a different kind of crust,” Kurt said.
“I’ll give it a fair shot. This stuff is good.”

“How’s the shop doing?” Kurt asked, as he started to clear his place.

Burt carried his dishes into the kitchen and sat at the island and talked to the other three while they cleaned up, cooked more, and goofed around.

At dinner, Burt fired up the grill and took the kabobs outside and braved the cold to grill them. The pie had chilled. Sebastian had made whipped cream for it earlier in the afternoon. Kurt showed Carol how to make the artichoke hearts. Sebastian continued to chop more bacon they had cooked earlier to sprinkle on the top of the potatoes au gratin and to use for breakfast the next morning.

When Burt came back in with the meat, he put it on the table, and sat down since the other three had already put the rest of the food on the table. They served themselves

“Well, I can’t say whether I would like these without the improvements of butter, garlic, bacon, but they’re good like this.”

Kurt laughed. “If I put butter, garlic, and bacon anything, I think you’d like it.”

“Smartypants,” he teased back. “I like the potatoes too, but I’m not sure I ever met a potato I didn’t like, especially if it had cheese on it.”

They all laughed.

Sebastian said, “I like the marinated meat and vegetables. Maybe we could look into an indoor grill.”

“That’s an idea or we could try putting one of those stainless meat racks or cooling racks in our glass casserole dish and see if we could sort of grill them in the oven.”

“Maybe. We could try that before we invest in an electric grill.”

“Well, as tasty as all of this is, I’m looking forward to the pie.” Burt got up and helped clear the table.

Kurt and Sebastian got up to get the pie. Kurt pulled it out and cut half of it into four pieces and plated them. Sebastian carried the whipped cream to the table. They all sat back down together.

Kurt took a bite of his before he added any whipped cream. “Ooh, I like it. It’s different, but really good.”

“It’s kind of like a pumpkin spice cheesecake, but not really,” Sebastian said and laughed at himself. “It doesn’t taste like cheesecake, but it’s a lot creamier than the pumpkin pie I’ve had a Grandma’s before. And I like the crust.”

“Me too,” Carole said. “I think I like this better than the traditional pumpkin pie. What about you, Burt?”

“They’re not the same at all. But I like both kinds.”

It didn’t take long for them to finish their slices of pie. They all worked together to clean up. Other than the pie, they made just enough to eat for dinner, so there weren’t leftovers to deal with. Once they finished, Carole had them all go into the living room.
“We decided that we would treat today like it’s Christmas Eve and tomorrow like it’s Christmas.” She walked over to their tree and pulled out two small gifts that had a card with them.

“Let me go get our gift for you,” Kurt said. He scurried off and came back with their gift and sat it on the coffee table in front of them. He sat back down on the floor with Sebastian.

“You two can go first. All three things are for both of you,” Carole said.

Each of them picked up one of the small gifts. Kurt deferred to Sebastian to open what he had in his hand. He unwrapped it and looked confused when he didn’t know what it was. Kurt broke out laughing, which confused Sebastian all the more.

“I LOVED that game. Open the case, Bas.” Kurt waited. “You roll those little plastic pigs like dice. You take note of how they land and the score pad has different combinations that you mark off as you roll them. And you get three chances to roll them to get the combination that you need.”

“It’s like pig Yahtzee.”

“Exactly,” Kurt said.

“I bet it’s a lot of fun. Thank you.”

Carole nodded and smiled.

Kurt unwrapped what he had. “Oh, I haven’t played this in ages either.”

Sebastian looked to see what it was, but didn’t recognize it either.

“It’s called Tangoes. There are two sets of plastic tile shapes in each box, so four people can play with these two sets. There are cards inside with shapes on them and you have to rearrange the plastic tiles to make the shape.” He looked up. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I wanted to get you something that was small enough that you could take it with you and maybe teach Sebastian’s cousins to play easily. There are practically no rules to either game.”

“That was really thoughtful of you,” Sebastian said. “All of them studied English in school, but Patrice is really the only one I would consider completely fluent. It would definitely be a struggle to play a game with cards with a lot of writing on them. These are great.”

Kurt put the larger present in between them to get Sebastian to open it with him. When the got the wrapping paper off, they still couldn’t tell what it was because it had been wrapped in a shoebox. Kurt pulled the lid off.

“A Paperwhite Kindle?” He picked it up. “Two Paperwhite Kindles?”

Sebastian saw a paper in the bottom and picked it up. “Kindle Unlimited?” He continued to read. “Oh, wow. Thank you.” He passed the paper to Kurt, who handed him one of the Kindles.

“You’ll need to attach both Kindles to your Amazon account and then add the gift certificate to your account and buy the Kindle Unlimited service,” Carole said. “You two like to read so much that we weren’t sure what books to get you and we thought this would allow you to read whatever books you like.”

“It’s perfect,” Kurt said. “Thank you.”
Sebastian said, “I didn’t even know this existed. I don’t really shop unless I have to. This will be really cool. Thank you.”

“You can get the Kindles out and connect them to your account this evening using our computer to access your Amazon account and you can choose a few books and you’ll have something to read on the long flights.”

“That’s a great idea.”

“There’s more in the box under the tissue paper.”

Sebastian lifted the tissue paper up. He found two leather cases.

“They were sold out of black and they didn’t come in gray, so I ordered navy for Kurt and dark green for you Sebastian. The other colors didn’t seem like ones you would like much. There was bright red, magenta, baby blue, and purple. I didn’t want to get vinyl or ‘faux leather’, as it’s referred to. I did that once to save money and the case fell apart pretty quickly.”

“Navy and dark green are great.” He took his Kindle out of the box and put it in the navy case.

Sebastian followed Kurt’s lead. “I actually really like this. It’s more like holding a book than trying to read something on my iPad.” Once he got it in, he fooled around with it a bit. “Oh, now that’s cool. You can turn it and stand the case up and put it on a desk or table. I can read while I eat.”

“That’s a nice feature.” Kurt flattened the boxes the Kindles came in and kept them with the paper with the gift certificate code on it. He put the rest of the wrapping and packaging in the shoebox.

Kurt said, “Open your present.”

She picked it up and put it on the couch between them and Burt helped pull the paper off. “Hey! That’s my Fish? I’ve never heard of it.”

“It’s a new game with really good reviews,” Kurt said. “We thought we could play it tonight.”

“I think we can set it up right here on the coffee table if you want,” Sebastian said.

“Sure, honey.” She grabbed the magazines that were on the table and moved them to the end table next to her.

Burt pulled out a pocketknife and slit the plastic wrap to get it off easily. They pulled the directions out and Kurt read them out loud. They took all of the cards out and set them up and started the game. They played it several times before they switched to playing Pass the Pigs for a while.

About 9:00, Kurt yawned, and reached up to cover his mouth quickly. “Sorry. We’ve been up since 4:00. And with going to see Wicked last night, there was no way to go to bed early. We didn’t get out of the theater until nearly 11:00, so we only got about four hours of sleep last night.”

“It’s fine, honey. We can play more tomorrow. Go get some sleep. I know you don’t know how to sleep in, but try.”

“I will try.”

“’Night, boys,” Burt said.
“Good night,” Sebastian responded.

“Good night.”

The next morning, Kurt woke up at 7:45. He tried to slip out of Sebastian’s arms, but he doubled-down on his hold on Kurt, which made Kurt laugh.

“Carole told you to sleep in,” Sebastian said.

“I did. It’s 7:45.”

Sebastian smiled. “You’re right. That is sleeping in for you.” Sebastian kissed his neck.

Kurt responded by kissing the top of his head. “I take it that you don’t want me to get up yet.”

“Nope. You’re busy being my body pillow.”

Kurt laughed. “I’m certainly not fluffy.”

“No, but you’re soft and I can hear your heart beating.” Sebastian moved his thumb gently back and forth across Kurt’s heart, caressing him. “I love you.”

“I love you too. How about 15 minutes of touching and snuggles, and then we get up?”

“Mmm. How about 45 minutes of touching and snuggles?”

“You know I can’t resist. I agree to your terms.”

“Good.” He kissed his neck again and pushed up to sit up. He got Kurt to scoot over a bit and he straddled him, sitting on his knees. He began to caress and lightly rub everywhere he could reach.

“That feels so good.”

A few minutes after 9:00, they made their way to the kitchen. Carole was already up and cooking.

“You could have gotten us up to help,” Kurt said apologetically.

“Nope. You need the sleep and all I’ve done is make deviled eggs because they sounded good. So, that’s what’s for breakfast.”

“Works for me,” Sebastian said, as he reached for one and popped it in his mouth. After he swallowed he said, “I like those.”

Her eyes lit up and she smiled. “I’m glad. I figured you two can eat them while we get started. I did make the coleslaw last night after you went to bed because it always tastes better if it’s chilled overnight. I haven’t tasted it yet, but I will before we go in case it needs something like a little more salt or something.”

“So, we’re making the French custard first, then we’ll get the soup started, and we’ll make the French bread last.” Kurt said.

“Well, first you two can set that Kindle Unlimited thing up so your books can get downloaded to
your Kindles while we cook.

“That’s a good idea since I have no idea how long it takes for the books to download.”

“Not long for one, but I figured you would download several. Follow me and you can get it going. You can come back to the kitchen once you’ve got the books going to the Kindles.”

They spent the rest of the day alternating between eating, cooking, cleaning, talking, and they played Tangues in their down time. By 4:00, they were all dressed and the car was packed. They left for Columbus. They arrived a little less than two hours later. Isabelle greeted them when the arrived. It took Kurt and Sebastian a few trips to get everything in.

Isabelle showed Carole to the kitchen so she could warm up the mini muffins and quickly cook the green beans. Kurt and Sebastian put the French custard and the pie in the refrigerator and when Carole was nearly done, they pulled the ham, potatoes, the broccoli casserole, and the mini cheese muffins out of the oven and took them to the dining room. Kurt went back for the coleslaw. Carole followed him in with the green beans.

“Well, this is very festive and looks delicious,” Grandma Smythe said. “Let’s go ahead and eat while everything is warm.”

Sebastian carved the ham and served everyone as the plates were passed to him. They passed the other dishes around the table serving themselves. They ate and chatted. When everyone was finished, Kurt and Sebastian cleared the table. No one was ready for dessert yet. They packed up the leftovers in Grandma’s Smythe containers and washed Carole’s so that she could take them with her the next morning.

When they went back out to the dining room, just Isabelle was waiting for them.

“That was delicious.”

“Thank you,” Sebastian said. “We put the leftovers in the fridge for you and Grandma.”

“Thanks. Everyone else has retired to the library to play games.”

“Shall we, then?” Kurt asked and offered his arm to Isabelle.

They spent the rest of the evening playing traditional board games.

Kurt put the sample bubble bath he had brought with them in the tub when it was about two-thirds as full as he was going to fill it. He swirled it around. He and Sebastian got in once it was ready. Kurt sat next to Sebastian and moved to get comfortable in his lap once he was in the tub. He scooted up and Sebastian wrapped his arms around him. Kurt wrapped his hand around the back of Sebastian’s neck and drew him closer and kissed him breathless.

“I really want one of these tubs,” Kurt said.

“Maybe someday. I really like being in here with you.”

When the water got to cold to enjoy sitting in the tub, they moved to the shower for a continuation of their kissing and making out. They had no trouble falling asleep.
The next morning, they woke up about 7:00 and opted to spend another hour in bed enjoying each other and themselves. They showered quickly and dressed before going down and starting breakfast.

Carole joined them not long after they had gotten started. They had brought the bacon they had planned to use the previous morning as well as finely ground turkey sausage. They made a traditional quiche Lorraine and one with sausage in it. By the time they were ready, everyone else had come downstairs.

They ate breakfast together and afterwards, Burt and Carole said their goodbyes and they left to go to Zanesville for Carole’s family’s Christmas luncheon. After they had left, the others went into the music room, which was more festively decorated than the other rooms in the house.

“I was hoping that Kurt might play the piano for us. There’s a music book on the piano. I’m certainly not a great singer, but singing is great fun. Maybe you can pick a few and we can muddle through.”

Kurt sat down at the piano and looked through the book. “How about ‘Rudolph’?”

“Sure, dear. You start us off and we’ll join in.”

*You know Dasher, and Dancer, and Prancer, and Vixen.*
*Comet, and Cupid, and Donner, and Blitzen.*
*But do you recall the most famous reindeer of all?*

Everyone joined in and sang along. They sang “Frosty the Snowman”, “Santa Claus is Coming to Town”, and “Jingle Bells”.

Kurt turned a few pages and played “Walking in a Winter Wonderland” and “Let it Snow”. When he finished, he turned around on the piano bench and faced them.

“Well, that was lovely and fun,” Grandma said. “I haven’t been able to play in years and I miss it. You play quite well Kurt.”

“Thank you.”

Sebastian excused himself and went up to their room. Isabelle did as well. When he came back down, he handed Grandma their gift.

“Thank you, dear. I’ll wait for Isabelle to come back.”

She came in the room as Grandma Smythe finished her statement.

“They already gave me my gift the other day at work. It’s this lovely vintage scarf I’m wearing. Kurt struck gold somewhere around town again.” She winked at him.

“I have to have some secrets,” he said. He took the gift she handed to him. “This is huge.”

Sebastian accepted his as well. “Thank you.”

“Go ahead and open them.”

Kurt looked intrigued and opened his. He unwrapped it. “No way!” He stood up and put the mid-thigh length, dark gray, herringbone-patterned wool coat on. “Oh, my God! How did you get your
hands on the Brunello Cucinelli coat?”

“I have my own secrets.”

He buttoned it. “It fits perfect. Thank you.”

Kurt opened the card next. He moved so that Sebastian could see because both heir names were written on the front. It was sappy and sweet. He smiled and opened the smaller card inside. “A gift card to Taj II. Thank you.”

“Well, I know you two go there every Monday night, so I figured you must like it there.”

“We do. It’s a lot of fun. You should come with us. Bring Chase. He can dance.”

“I’ll think about it.”

Sebastian unwrapped his package.

“Bas, it’s the Officine Generale coat!”

Sebastian laughed. “You know I have absolutely no idea why that is so important, but this is a really nice coat.” He stood up and put the coat on. It was mid-thigh length wool coat like Kurt’s, but his was black tweed and it had an almost snakeskin pattern to the tweed. “This is really sharp. Thank you. I won’t bother to ask how you managed to get it.”

“It looks really good on you, Bas.”

“Thanks. These aren’t quite as heavy as the coats we brought with us, but they’d be plenty warm in Paris.”

Isabelle said, “I can take your coats back with me and you can get them when you come back if you want.”

“That would be great,” Kurt said. “I really love mine.” He still had it on and he was rolling up onto his toes while trying to look less giddy than he felt.

“Well, they both look great on you two. Maybe one day soon, I’ll convince you two to model for a shoot.”

They both rolled their eyes.

“I know you both always roll your eyes like I’m crazy, but I’m serious.”

Sebastian slipped his coat off and laid it neatly over the back of the chair near him. He picked up the gift he had brought down and handed it to Grandma Smythe.

She took it from him. “You didn’t need to get me a gift.”

Kurt looked at her and smiled while raising an eyebrow.


Kurt slipped his new coat off and placed it neatly next to Sebastian’s and they followed Grandma Smythe to the library where they could sit comfortably at a table. They played until lunchtime. Kurt, Sebastian, and Isabelle warmed up ham slices along with the leftovers from the luncheon
Grandma Smythe had hosted and their dinner the night before. They took everything out to the dining room once it was ready.

“I like the game,” Grandma said. “It’s completely different than any game I’ve ever played before.”

“We have two other games with us that we can play after lunch. They were Kurt’s parents’ gifts to us for Christmas.”

When they finished eating, they had dessert as well.

“I liked that pumpkin pie you brought,” Isabelle said. “It was different than regular pumpkin pie.”

Kurt said, “Carole found the recipe in a magazine, but had never tried it. That’s where most of the things we brought came from. She had a stash of recipes that she had saved for years, but never got around to trying, so we made several of them yesterday and the day before. We ended up liking all of them.”

They cleaned up after lunch and spent the rest of the afternoon talking and playing games. When Isabelle got up to turn a few lights on in the library, Kurt checked his watch.

“We have to leave in 45 minutes,” he said.

“Well, then let’s wrap this up,” Grandma Smythe said. “You and I are tied at three rounds each. We’ll have a final round between just the two of us.”

Kurt smiled at her competitive nature. Isabelle and Sebastian began packing their Tangoes set back into the box that they hadn’t used the cards from. Grandma Smythe turned over a new card and she and Kurt got busy rearranging their tiles to make the image. Kurt reached out and turned the card over indicating that he had finished. She looked up and he turned the card back over and she looked at his completed image.

“We’ll you’ve bested me this time, dear, but I’m going to order myself a pack of these and play because it’s fun. And we’ll have a rematch.” She looked very serious, yet there was a hint of teasing to her voice. “Let’s go eat the leftover quiche for a quick dinner. Isabelle can warm it up while you two go up and bring your bags down.”

The two of them went upstairs and pulled the gloves out of the coats they had brought with them and put them in their backpacks. They made sure nothing else was left in the pockets.

“You were awfully excited about that coat.”

“That coat costs more than a used car. I would never own one in my lifetime if I had to pay for it. Even if I had the money to buy one, I wouldn’t. But I really like it.”

“More than a used car?”

“Somewhere around $4500.”

“And mine?”

“About $500.”

“I see. I feel better. I’m not sure how I feel with you walking around wearing a $4500 coat.”

“I think 99% of the people who see it will have no idea that it costs that much. I don’t think there’s
a huge market for stealing people’s coats to hock them.”

“If you say so. I hope you’re right. I don’t want you to get mugged for your coat.”

“If I’m going to be mugged for my coat, I think it will be by someone who doesn’t have one, not because of the type of coat I have on.” He wrapped his arms around Sebastian. “I don’t want to get mugged either, but if I do, I will give them my coat and not mess around about it. My amazing, fabulous coat is not worth being injured over.” He kissed Sebastian. “I want to come home to my way more amazing and fabulous boyfriend than I want to keep my coat.”

Sebastian kissed him sweetly. “Good.” He hugged him and stepped back. “Let’s get this stuff downstairs and eat.”

They put their bags in the music room with their new coats. They took the coats they had brought with them into the dining room.

“Just put them on the back of a chair. I’ll take them up and pack them and hang them up at my place when I go back to New York Sunday.”

“Thanks again for the coat,” Kurt said. “It’s spectacular.”

“Well, of course you know I didn’t pay for it. I traded for it. It was worth the trade.” She winked at him.

He looked concerned.

“Not THAT kind of trade,” she laughed. “Definitely NOT that kind of trade. The model that it was tailored to fit for the photo shoot had no use for yet another expensive coat. What he wanted was some of that more everyday wear that we had in the vault. You two took a few pieces from that shoot. Leather, denim, soft sweaters, and some henleys.”

“I remember,” Kurt said.

“He said that he gets so many clothes that have such a limited option for use that he really needed some regular clothes because modeling just barely pays his bills some months. So, I pulled quite a bit of the stuff after Sebastian took the black leather jacket and traded it for the coat because I knew it would fit you perfectly because you have the same build as the model.”

“So that’s where most of it vanished to.”

“It is. You two had taken what you wanted and no one else wanted any of it because it was too casual.”

“And Sebastian’s?”

“Ah, well the model that ended up with that coat wanted a very specific purse that had been in one of the Vogue shoots to give to his mother for her birthday.”

“You are the barter queen.”

She laughed. “Maybe so.”

“What’s your secret?” Kurt asked.

“The trick to it is to befriend the photographers. They know the model’s names and how to get into contact with them. So, when I see a photo of something I’d really like to have, I get their
contact information and I call them and ask them if there’s anything I could do for them in exchange for whatever it is that they have that I want.”

“I see. Your trick won’t work for me though because I don’t have enough connections to get someone something they want.”

“You don’t have enough connections YET. Give it time. You’re young. I didn’t have these connections 20 years ago.”

He nodded.

The doorbell rang.

Grandma Smythe said, “The driver must be here already.”

“I’ll go let him in, Grandma,” Isabelle said. She put her last bite of quiche in her mouth and got up to go answer the door.

“Leave the dishes. We’ll clean them up.”

“Thank you for having us,” Kurt said, as he got up.

“You’re welcome, dear. It was my pleasure. You two are a lot of fun to have around and you’re interesting to talk to. I hope you have a fantastic time with the rest of your family in Paris.”

“I’m sure we will,” Sebastian said. “Thank you for letting us go see them.”

“You’re quite welcome. You better get your stuff and get going, dear.”

She followed into the music room and then to the front door where Isabelle was still waiting with the driver. Sebastian stepped closer and hugged her. She hugged Kurt next.

Isabelle hugged both of them as well. “Merry Christmas,” she said. “Have fun!”

“We will,” Kurt said. “Merry Christmas to you two as well.”

When they finally made it out of the airport, it was a little after 11:00 in the morning. Sebastian put money on their Metro cards and they headed to Celeste’s place. When they got there, they were greeted a houseful of people who were excited to see them. It was a bit overwhelming for Kurt. The living room furniture had all been moved up against the walls and folding tables and chairs had been sat up all around the dining and living room area. All of the food was ready to eat on the counters in the kitchen. They put their bags in their room, changed their shirts, made a brief stop in the bathroom, and then went back into the living room to greet everyone. They were ushered to the front of the line that had formed while they were out of the room. They went through, filled their plates, sat down, and started to eat.

Georges, Letti, Noelle, Patrice, and Leon all sat at the same table with them.

As Zara walked past, she said, “I love those coats you were wearing. I saw them in Vogue.”

“They were our Christmas gifts from Isabelle,” Sebastian said.

“Well, Isabelle gives amazing Christmas gifts,” she winked as she sat down at the next table down with Nadine, Marcel, and Damien.
Grandmère got up from where she had originally sat down and came and sat in the empty chair at the table with the seven of them.

Kurt overheard Zara telling Nadine about the coats and smiled. He turned his focus back to the people he was sitting with. Kurt and Sebastian talked about the fall play, Sebastian’s senior thesis paper, the Winter Showcase, and the spring musical. Letti, Noelle, and Georges told them about how their jobs were going since they had all had time to settle in to their work. Patrice and Leon talked about their research and a few presentations Patrice had given and the painting Leon had been working to restore. Grandmère sat and listened to all of them.

“I just want you all to know how proud I am of all of you turning out to be such decent people. You’ve all worked hard and still work hard. You care for your friends and love your families. I’m just really proud of all of you. I brag about all of you to anyone who will listen.”

The seven of them beamed. “There are a few things I know about that I didn’t hear anyone share.” She looked at Patrice in particular.

“Oh, yes. Leon and I are getting married in three weeks. Well, actually three weeks from yesterday.”

“Why didn’t you tell us?” Sebastian asked. “Congratulations!”

“Well, you knew we were engaged, but I got accepted to give a presentation in Alsace on the 19th and we decided that we’d make it our honeymoon. So, we’ll go to the Mairie Friday afternoon, and then have the ceremony that evening. We’ll take the train late that night and come back Wednesday. I only have to give a morning presentation and I already have it ready, so the rest of the time we can go sightseeing. And we didn’t tell you because I only found out that I was chosen on Wednesday. I figured you were busy doing holiday stuff at Kurt’s parents and I didn’t want to interrupt since you’d be here today.”

“Well, we’re really happy for you,” Kurt said.

Leon said, “Thanks. We’re really excited too. It won’t be a super formal event, so don’t worry about what to wear.”

Grandmère looked at Letti and smiled.

“Georges and I got our own place. We can move in on the first. It’s this teeny tiny place, but it’s ours.”

“That’s exciting,” Kurt said.

Sebastian turned to Noelle, “When do Kurt and I get to meet Edmond?”

“Actually, he should be here soon. He had a family breakfast this morning.”

“So, things are moving along more than I had realized if you invited him into the crazy that is having everyone here at once.”

“He’s already met Mom and Dad, Patrice and Leon, and, of course, Letti and Georges.”

Sebastian teased her, “Well I figured that Letti and Georges had met him. Letti wouldn’t consider letting just anyone court you. She probably ran a background check on him.”

Letti gave Sebastian a “who me?” look and when Noelle looked away, Letti winked at him. He
nodded nearly imperceptibly.

They finished what they had on their plates. Noelle’s phone beeped once, and she got up to go answer the knock at the door that no one had heard. Grandmère got up and went to sit with Celeste and André. Edmond followed Noelle to the bedroom and left his coat with the others, and then she brought him over to the table.

“Edmond, this my cousin Sebastian and his boyfriend Kurt.”

Edmond extended his hand and shook their hands before he sat down. “It’s nice to meet both of you. Noelle told me that you live in New York. Is it as crazy as it seems in the movies?”

“It can be,” Sebastian said. “But not really that much crazier than living in any other metropolis. You know, the more people you have in a small space, the more noticeable the craziness is.”

Edmond nodded. “That’s true.”

Noelle said, “I know you had the family breakfast, but I’m not sure how long ago you actually ate. There’s plenty of food in the kitchen, if you’re hungry.”

“I should eat a little something. We ate about three hours ago, so I’m not starving, but I will be by dinner if I don’t eat a little something for lunch.”

She nodded and went to the kitchen. He followed her.

Sebastian said, “Alright, so Letti’s background check came back that he’s not a wanted man, but is he nice? Does he treat Noelle right?”

“He’s so sweet to her,” Letti said. “I did do a background check. I’m not sorry either. I love Noelle. She’s my best friend and she hasn’t really liked a guy in four years. I didn’t want some stalker-type hitting on her. His family has money, but they’re not super wealthy. He’s kind of a geek, but we all like him.”

“Define geek,” Kurt said.

“Likes sci fi stuff,” Patrice said. “Does silly stuff to make her laugh. Tries to do impressions. He gets the tone of voice and attitudes right, but his French accent when he speaks English interferes with his ability to do them correctly. Although, the accent is much less noticeable when he sings.”

“He sings?”

Patrice answered, “Love songs to embarrass or flatter Noelle. I’m not sure which. She giggles, so I assume that means that she finds it endearing.”

Kurt smiled. “It probably does.”

The two of them came back and sat down. Kurt looked him over more closely on their way back. He appeared to be about the same height as Kurt and Leon. Georges was only slightly taller than Kurt. Edmond was slim, like Leon, but not athletic like Georges, Kurt, and Sebastian. Kurt had finally relaxed and focused after eating and Letti’s haircut finally registered. She had cut about six inches off the bottom, which left it about down to her shoulder blades in the back.

“I like your haircut Letti.”
“It took you long enough to notice,” she teased.

“The food is reengaging my brain. Some coffee would help. Overnight flights and jet lag. My brain thinks it’s 7:00 in the morning, and I got about three hours of sleep last night. I don’t sleep well on planes.”

Patrice got up and went to the kitchen.

Sebastian leaned over and said, “She went to make you coffee.”

“She didn’t have to.”

“You mentioned coffee would help you think more clearly, so she went to make you some.”

He nodded.

“I thought I’d like the layers I had done last spring, but I didn’t really. I had it cut up to where the next to longest layer was. I’ll probably have it trimmed this length every few months until the top layer is this long. Once I had the layers done, I always had to fool with it to get it to look decent. I’d rather it be sort of boring and less of a hassle.”

“It looks fuller already.”

She smiled, “Thanks.”

Patrice came back with two cups of coffee, made exactly the way Kurt and Sebastian took theirs and sat them on the table in front of them.

“Thank you,” Kurt said. “That was really kind of you.”

“You’re welcome. One of us should have thought about how tired you two would be and made some coffee for when you got here.”

“It’s perfect,” Sebastian said, after he took a sip of his.

She smiled and sat back down next to Leon, who wrapped his arm around the back of her chair, beaming and clearly in love with her.

“I’m getting mine trimmed up week after next like usual,” Patrice said. I go on the first Saturday every month to this little barbershop not far from here. The same man has been cutting my hair in this exact style for about 10 years. He’s efficient and inexpensive, plus he likes history.” She wore hers very similar to Anna Wintour’s hairstyle, with just slightly fewer and shorter bangs.

“He sounds very reliable,” Kurt said.

“He is. He gives me the first appointment in the morning and he finishes in about 15 minutes. I went to someone else once when I was out of town on the first Saturday of the month. It wasn’t a pleasant experience. If I absolutely can’t make it on the appointed day, I reschedule.”


“My thoughts exactly. And now he does Leon’s right after mine and it looks so good now.”

Leon chuckled. “I’m glad you like it.”

Letti ran her fingers and thumb down her cheeks mimicking stroking a beard and asked Kurt, “So,
“what’s with the not shaving? There’s no way that’s just from not shaving this morning.”

“Ah, well that’s my doing,” Sebastian said. “I wanted to see what he looked like with a beard, so he stopped shaving about a week ago – after the semester ended.”

“So, what’s the verdict so far,” she asked.

Kurt turned to look at Sebastian.

“I like it, I think.” Sebastian smiled. “We’ll have to see in another week or so. Is there a plan for today besides eating and talking that we should know about?”

“Later the eight of us are going to the movies and then ice skating,” Georges said. “There’s this place that has adult skate time from 9:00 until midnight on Saturdays.”

“We’ll all go home at some point and change and come back,” Noelle said. “You two can take a nap while we’re gone,”

“Leon and I will bring back a couple of sporty coats that you can wear skating unless you want to wear those long coats you had on.”

Sebastian said, “Sporty coats would be great. Thanks. They don’t have to be super heavy, we have hoodies we can put on underneath.”

“I can’t remember if this is the place that requires gloves or not,” Letti said. “Just make sure you have gloves or you might have to buy a pair.”

Kurt nodded.

They all sat around and talked for a bit longer before they headed back into the kitchen for dessert. Once they had all finished, the youngest generation was tasked with the disassembly of the tables and putting the furniture back while the leftover food was packed up.

Everyone regrouped and spent a while talking. Eventually, most everyone had taken their leave. The eight of them that were going out split up in two groups and played the games that Kurt and Sebastian brought with them. After a couple of hours, it was plain to see that Kurt and Patrice were an even match when it came to visual spatial skills. Everyone though the pig throwing game was funny and fun to play. About 4:00, they put the games away.

Noelle said, “Before we go we have a gift for the two of you. It’s from all of and we do not expect a gift in return.”

Letti came over to the table with two packages and put them in front of Kurt and Sebastian.

They opened them and pulled out really high quality, thick hoodies with Paris embroidered on the front. Kurt’s was a deep burgundy and Sebastian’s was a deep forest green.

“Thank you,” Kurt said.

“Thanks.”

“We saw you looking at some when you were here before, but you didn’t get any. We figured you had already bought jackets you had to wear back and didn’t have any room to pack them,” Noelle said. “I know Sebastian’s favorite color is green, but I didn’t know what Kurt’s favorite color was, but that color looks good on almost everyone.”
“I like the color. We can wear them skating tonight.”

She smiled. “I’m glad. They left it up to me to pick.”

Kurt laughed. “You did good.”

Letti said, “We’ll let you get some sleep.”

“We’ll be back for you at 6:00,” Georges said, as he grabbed the gift wrap to clean the table off.

Kurt and Sebastian stood up, taking their hoodies with them, and went to their room.

Kurt convinced Sebastian to take a quick shower before they lay down. They were the only ones in the house so they ran to their room in just their towels. Kurt locked the bedroom door behind them. He put their towels on the doorknob. Sebastian set his alarm and put it beside the bed. They slid under the covers and snuggled up.

“Those hoodies are really nice. That was a fun surprise.”

“I didn’t think they’d do anything outlandish.”

“We’ll get to go to Patrice and Leon’s wedding. That’s exciting.”

“It is. Edmond kind of reminds me of Sam. Funny, outgoing, friendly, and a little goofy.”

“He does in a way. He seems to really like Noelle.”

“I’m imagining that they will be officially a couple very soon. Bringing him here today to meet the whole family is pretty much the last step. If he shows up for the movie and skating, we didn’t scare him off. He had a good time from what I could tell. And he didn’t act like us being gay was a problem.”

Kurt kissed Sebastian. “Aren’t we supposed to be napping?”

“More kissing. Scoot closer.”

“If I move closer, I’ll be on top of you.”

“Sounds good to me.”

“So no sleeping?”

“I’ll behave. I slept more last night than you did. You big the big spoon, so I’m less tempted.”

Sebastian kissed Kurt one last time before he turned over and they got comfortable. It didn’t take long for Kurt to fall asleep.

At 5:20, Sebastian’s phone alarm went off.


Sebastian rolled over and got up on his hands and knees, caging Kurt in place. He leaned down onto his elbows instead of his hand and started to kiss Kurt’s neck. “Come on, sleepyhead. There’s lots of kisses for you if you wake up.”

“This will not lead to us being ready in 35 minutes.”

“I’ll wear my hat.”

Sebastian laughed. “Well, then…”

Sebastian opened the door at 6:00 and let Georges and Letti in. They stayed by the door to wait for the others while Kurt and Sebastian put their boots on. The other four arrived with in a few minutes. Kurt and Sebastian put the puffer coats on that Leon and Georges brought for them to wear and they headed for the Metro station.

They walked four to a row, with Georges, Letti, Edmond, and Noelle walking in front of the other four.

“What movie are we going to see?” Kurt asked.


“Is that the one with Maggie Smith?”

“It is,” she answered.

“I bet it’s good. She’s so entertaining.”

“It is dubbed?”

“Subtitles.”

“Good.”

“I agree.”

Kurt pointed to Noelle and Edmond walking very close together, hand in hand.

“That happened while you were napping,” Patrice said quietly in English.

“Bas said it wouldn’t be long.”

“He was right. He’s her boyfriend now. She’s thrilled.”

“Good for her.”

They went back to the Metro for the nearly half-hour ride to the skating rink after the movie ended.

Sebastian moved from standing next to Kurt, holding his hand to standing facing him. He put his other hand on the side of Kurt’s face and kissed him. Kurt smiled. “What was that for?”

“Now I need reasons to kiss you?” Sebastian teased. “Hmm. Let’s see. First reason – I love you.”

“That’s a good reason.”
“I’m glad you approve.” He kissed him again. “Second reason – You’re so kissable.”

Kurt laughed. “Kissable? Is that even a word?”

“Dr. Seuss made up words all the time and so did Shakespeare.”

“You’re adorable.” Kurt kissed him this time. “I love you too.”

Noelle grabbed Kurt’s coat sleeve. “Come on, you lovebirds. Our train is here.”

They followed Noelle into the car. They managed to get seats near each other. They talked about the movie for a while. Once they got off the subway, they didn’t have to walk too far to get to the ice rink. When they got there, the adult skate time had just started. There were laser lights bouncing all around the rink with a DJ playing music like it was a dance club. They rented skates and put them on and went out to the ice.

Kurt turned backwards and put his hands on Sebastian’s shoulders and they skated around. Sebastian could skate backwards too, but they had found it easier with Kurt skating backwards in a crowded rink because Sebastian could see over his shoulders so they didn’t run into anyone. With the lights off and the laser lights circling around the rink, no one was skating quickly around in circles like a typical skating rink. Couples were skating around hand in hand and skating like they were dancing. In the center area, people were showing off their ice hip hop skills and dance moves.

Kurt tipped his head toward the exit as they got closer. They stepped off the ice and Kurt walked along the edge of the rink until they were right in the middle.

“What’s up?”

“I just wanted to watch some of those people skate dancing in the middle without getting us run over by standing still on the ice.”

Sebastian moved behind him and wrapped his arms around him and propped his chin on Kurt shoulder and kissed his neck. “This is a cool idea. It kind of reminds me of pictures I’ve seen of roller skating rinks in the 70’s.”

Kurt pointed. “That guy to the right of center is really good.”

Sebastian looked to where Kurt was pointing and watched. “He really is. That gives me an idea. One day this week, I’d like to drop by and thank Bernard.”

“Who’s Bernard?”

“My dance teacher. Without his great teaching, I would be serving coffee somewhere to feed myself. And as much as I enjoy a good cup of coffee, I’d rather dance.”

Kurt turned in his arms carefully and kissed him. “I love watching you dance.”

“Mmm.” Sebastian held him close. “I love to dance with you.” He swayed a bit in place. “We’re definitely going out dancing again. I gave Letti the task of finding a good place. Now, Noelle has someone to go with too. I’m glad for her. I hope everything works out for them.”

“Me too. Celeste and Andre aren’t coming back until tomorrow evening, right?”

“Right. Why?”
“I was thinking about massages.”

“Did you pack the massage oil?”

“I did. Let’s go back out and skate some more.” Kurt kissed him.

“OW! Right there!”

“I know, Bas. It’s always the same spot. I think you need to do some stretches or something before we skate.” Kurt gently massaged Sebastian’s calf muscle until it didn’t hurt anymore and he couldn’t feel a knot.

“Thank you.”

Kurt crawled up the bed and kissed him. “You’re welcome. I’m going to go wash my hands.” Kurt locked the door out of habit and got in bed. “No alarm. Maybe since my body thinks it’s 8:00, I’ll manage to sleep for longer. And according to your phone, sunrise won’t be until 8:45, so there’s hope.”

Sebastian kissed him. “I’m so glad you’re here with me. It makes everything feel right. So much has changed in a year. Last year I was here but I felt like a puzzle piece that didn’t quite fit. But it’s not like that now. Now, we fit.”

“We do. I love it here. Coming back makes it harder to want to stay in New York, but I still want to give Broadway a shot.”

“I know. And I’ll be there writing while you’re auditioning. I can write in the evenings if you get a role. Then we can spend time together during the day. We’ll find a way to make it work.”

“Thank you for believing in me.”

“You are incredibly talented.” He kissed Kurt tenderly. “I love you. I’m going to turn over and be the little spoon.”

“I love you too.” Kurt scooted up behind him. They moved into positions their bodies knew and fell asleep quickly.

Kurt managed to sleep until 10:00, which surprised both of them. They got ready, ate leftovers for brunch, drank some coffee, and headed out for the afternoon. They browsed through a couple of old bookstores, meandered into a few art galleries, and wandered through parts of Paris that they hadn’t visited the previous summer.

Right before 4:00, they went up the stairs to the Église de la Madeleine.

“Very neoclassic. I think those are Corinthian columns. We didn’t come here the last time.”

“We didn’t, but it’s lovely inside and this is my other Christmas gift to you. You had mentioned wanting to hear one of the pipe organs when we were here the last time.”

“There’s a concert here today? Someone is actually going to play the organ?”

Sebastian smiled at Kurt’s enthusiasm. “Yes and yes.”
“Excellent. Let’s go get seats. We can look around more when it’s over.”

They sat down and waited for the program to begin. Once the music started, Kurt discretely took Sebastian’s hand. He closed his eyes and let the music wash over him. An hour later when the concert had concluded, Kurt continued to sit with his eyes closed in the quiet. A few minutes later, he took a deep breath, let it out, and opened his eyes.

“That was phenomenal. I heard Pachelbel, Händel, Bach, and Scherer. I didn’t recognize the others, but I love Baroque music. Thank you for bringing me here.” Kurt wiped his eyes.

“You’re welcome. Do you want to look around?”

Kurt nodded. He stood up and intentionally put his hands in his pockets to keep himself for reaching out for Sebastian. Sebastian followed him out of the pew and they took their time looking around the interior of the church for the next hour. When they were back out on the stairs, Kurt buttoned his coat and reached for Sebastian’s hand as soon he had fastened his coat.

“That was just … I’m not sure there are really words to describe it. The sound is everywhere and it fills your body too in a way that listening to recordings just can’t.”

Sebastian pulled Kurt’s hand up to his mouth and kissed his knuckles. “Is there anywhere you’d like to go on the way to Grandmère’s?”

“Let’s stop and get her some flowers and maybe her favorite cheese or some food item that she is reluctant to buy for herself because it seems too extravagant.”

“Sure. We’ll stop in a flower shop.”

Sebastian, Kurt. It’s good to see you again. I know it was just yesterday, but come in, come in.”

Sebastian gave her the flowers. They had chosen a combination of red flowers – dahlias, carnations, roses, and lilies.

“These are lovely. You can hang your coats in the armoire. I’ll go get a vase for these.”

They followed her into the kitchen after they had hung their coats up. She was trimming the stems to fit her vase when they came in. She put the flowers in the vase.

“This is a lovely selection of flowers. Very festive. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, Grandmère.”

“Dinner will be very simple and not at all French. I’ve become very fond of the crockpot in my old age. It’s easy. I put things in, turn it on, and a few hours later, the whole place smells fantastic and my food is ready. I’ve taken to making enough for two meals for dinner each day and I eat the second portion for lunch the next day. It makes things simple. I brought Celeste’s home with me yesterday so I could make enough for all of us.”

“I’m sure we’ll enjoy whatever you’ve made,” Kurt assured her. “If it’s ready, we can help you set the table or help serve it.”

“Not quite yet. Let’s go sit down for a bit.”

They followed her into the living room. She turned a small upholstered chair towards the sofa and
sat down facing them.

“I’d love for you to tell me what your thesis paper was about. I would read it if you had written in French, but you know my English isn’t good enough to read an academic research paper.”

Sebastian told her about his research and what he had written.

“Well, that is very interesting. I’m proud of you that you worked so hard on it and that you did well. I’m afraid that I didn’t know what to do with the file you emailed me of Kurt singing. I’d like to watch it if you’ll show me what to do.”

“Of course, Grandmère. Where is your laptop?”

“It’s on my desk.”

“I’ll go get it, if you’d like.”

“Yes, please.”

Sebastian came back with it and turned it on. He clicked opened the email app and found the email he had sent her. He showed her how to open the video file.

“Well, my, my. If I had known I only had to click on it twice, I would have already watched it. I thought I had to open some program to watch it.” She held the laptop and clicked the button to start the video.

Kurt excused himself to the bathroom. He made sure to stay gone long enough for both songs to play before he went back.

“Kurt, that was lovely. I don’t understand most of the words though.”

Sebastian reached for the laptop. He pulled up the lyrics for both songs and opened a word processing document and quickly translated both songs. He handed it back to her when he finished. “The song at the top is the first one he sang.”

She read through the lyrics. “That’s an interesting song, but pretty depressing.”

Kurt explained to her the general storyline of the musical.

She nodded and read through the second song. “Well, that one is a lot more upbeat and hopeful.”

“The dean of my school prefers slower emotional songs for this event. That’s what influenced my first song choice to some extent. The second song was requested because I had won.”

“Well, I really enjoyed both. Congratulations on winning.”

“Thank you.”

“Will you put this back on my desk and bring the file folder that on the desktop in here please?”

“Of course, Grandmère.” Sebastian came back a few minutes later and handed it to her.

“Now, I know this isn’t a topic you want to discuss, but it needs done. I will be 90 years old in a month. I will not live forever and despite filling the role of grandmother for all of my great nieces and nephews and great-grandmother to their children, you are still my only heir. All of the papers in this file are things you’ll need. I compiled them all for you since you’re not currently living here
to know exactly what to do. Having been through this with Granpère made me realize some complications you could run into. A copy of my will is in there as well. I need you to come with me to the bank tomorrow morning when it opens, just for a short visit to sign some paperwork. If we get it all done now, there will be no issues even if you are unable to return to France at the time. I know you will want to, but what we want and what is possible are not always the same thing. I have named Celeste as the executor and arranged for her to come to the bank as well.”

“I will go with the two of you.”

“As you know, we sold the home you grew up in. I was heartbroken about that, but heartbreak is part of life. We honestly outlived our retirement income and had to do something to generate enough income to continue to live. What’s left of that money will be yours, as well as this place and its contents. What you want to do with it after I’m gone will be up to you. You can rent it out and have one of your cousins take on the landlord duties. Or you can sell it if that’s what needs to happen. I just didn’t want to have anything caught up in legalities that would leave you the need to hire a lawyer or spend money and time to fight for what is yours.”

“Thank you, Grandmère. I appreciate that. I really do not know what would be involved, so you doing this for me will make a really hard situation easier.”

“When we go tomorrow, Celeste is opening a joint safety deposit box in her name and yours. There are two copies of everything that is already complete, and we will make two copies of everything you sign tomorrow. You can take one with you back to New York and you can leave the other set in the safety deposit box on the off-chance that you will be unable to make it here. In the papers you sign tomorrow will be one allowing Celeste to file all of the legal paperwork on your behalf. If you are able to come, she will not do anything. But if you cannot make it, she will make sure that everything is filed properly and all of my assets are transferred to you.”

Sebastian nodded.

“I’m sorry to start our evening on such a dreary topic, but I will feel better knowing that everything is done and that you will not have any legal or clerical issues to contend with.”

“Thank you.”

“Now, let’s go eat and talk about what you two have planned for your visit.”

After the trip to the bank the next morning, Sebastian returned to Celeste’s. Kurt had spent the morning doing their laundry, ironing, hanging up, and unpacking the rest of their clothes. They had plans to meet up with Georges for lunch at the school he worked at, so they left in time to sign in and get visitor’s passes. They spent about 30 minutes in his class answering questions about New York and living in the US in general before lunchtime. Afterwards, they visited several used music shops and Sebastian picked up a few CDs he liked. They wandered around the area looking in other shops and a couple of art galleries.

Tuesday before lunch, they went to the Palais Galliera. They met Letti for lunch and they got to see where she worked. After lunch, they went to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. That evening, they went out dancing with Letti and Georges.

Wednesday, they spent the morning wandering around the botanic gardens before meeting Noelle and Edmond for lunch. They spent several hours in the library looking at the different areas and looking at old books. When Noelle and Edmond got off, they met back up with Kurt and Sebastian.
and went to a speech by an author Sebastian had heard speak at Columbia in the spring of his freshman year by a French writer just a year older than him. Kurt stayed afterwards and spoke to him for a little while.

Thursday they spent the entire day at the Louvre again, this time bypassing less interesting pieces and spending more time on the things he liked the most. They had lunch with Patrice and Leon. They met up with everyone after work and ate dinner at Patrice and Leon’s place before heading to the Arc de Triomphe to celebrate New Year’s Eve and watch the fireworks.

Friday morning, Kurt woke up long before the sun was up. Kurt kissed the back of Sebastian’s neck.

“Mmm. That feels good.”

“Last night was a lot of fun. The fireworks were spectacular. I’ve had fun this whole week. Well, Wednesday night wasn’t fun, but it was definitely interesting. We make the same mistake about seeing France as this progressive place, when in reality, it’s not that different from the US. Big cities like Paris and New York and San Francisco are progressive, but places like Lima are far more common, there and here in France.”

“I had a completely different childhood experience. The two of you who grew up an ocean apart had a more similar childhood when I lived so much closer than you did. I’m so glad you got out of that.”

“Me too. It may be wrong of me, but I don’t want to think about that right now. It’s so weird that the sun isn’t up until almost 9:00 and it’s dark at 5:00. When I wake up at 7:30, that’s pretty late for me, but it looks like it’s midnight outside still.”

Sebastian scooted back against him, closing the practically non-existent space between them. “Winter is for snuggling and cuddling and staying warm in bed.”

“Mmm hmm, but I want to go out even though it’s dark outside. It’s 2016. The year we’re going to graduate from college. We get to start our real adult lives, for better or worse. We’ll have to see, but it’s exciting.”

“It is exciting. You’re right. I thought I wouldn’t graduate until 2017. But a lot of things are different than I thought they would be in a lot of ways, some good, some bad, and one really amazing.” Sebastian squirmed, causing Kurt to scoot back and giving him room to roll over. He put his hand along Kurt’s jaw and ran his thumb along the stubbly beard. “You’re the one really amazing change. I never knew what this could be like.” He gave him the lightest of kisses. “I love you. I’m so glad we’re together.”

“Me too.” Kurt ran his hands through Sebastian’s hair and left his hand on his neck. He very gently kissed Sebastian. “I love you too. I really enjoy lying in bed with you, but I really do want to go for a walk. Please come with me.”

“Yes, of course. Let’s go eat something quick like Nutella on bread, and then we’ll go for a walk.”

By the time they got to Sebastian’s favorite park, it was about five minutes before sunrise. Kurt guided them over to the bench where Sebastian had taken the photo-turned-painting in their bedroom. Sebastian sat down and Kurt snuggled up next to him. They sat and enjoyed their cups
of hot chocolate. Kurt had gotten a sprinkle of cinnamon in his just to try it. By the time they finished, what there was going to be of a sunrise had started. It was pretty foggy out, but at least it wasn’t blustering cold.

Kurt took Sebastian’s empty cup and put it on the other end of the bench with his. He had unbuttoned the two lowest buttons on his coat so he could move more easily before he sat down. He looked around the park and confirmed that they were still completely alone. He stood up and Sebastian started to get up. Kurt shook his head no and Sebastian relaxed and stayed seated. Kurt stepped in front of him, and then knelt and took Sebastian’s hands, holding them on Sebastian’s lap.

Without pausing to give Sebastian time to question his actions, Kurt said, “Sebastian Fontenay Smythe, I love you with my whole being. Will you marry me?”

Sebastian’s face lit up with pure joy. He pulled Kurt closer and leaned down to kiss him. “Yes.” He pulled Kurt up to standing as he stood. He wrapped his arms around Kurt and held him tight.

Kurt slipped his arms up between them and put his hands on the side of Sebastian’s face and kissed him again.

Sebastian locked his arms in position and spun Kurt in a circle, causing Kurt to laugh. He put him down quickly and kissed him again. “Yes. Yes. A million times yes.”
Chapter 38

Chapter Notes

This story will be updated January 1st.
Happy Holidays to everyone!

Sebastian stepped back just a bit so he could look Kurt in the eyes. He saw the same love and joy and excitement that he felt in Kurt’s eyes. A huge, almost goofy, grin spread across Sebastian’s face.

Kurt slid his right hand up and wrapped it around the back of Sebastian’s neck. He closed the small space between them and kissed him. “I love you, Bas. I love you more than I even knew I could love someone.” He ran his thumb along Sebastian’s jaw line.

Sebastian pulled Kurt closer and nuzzled his face into Kurt’s neck. “I love you too.”

Kurt slid his hand down Sebastian’s shoulder and placed it on his upper arm. He started to sway and slow dance in place as he sang quietly into Sebastian’s ear.

*Can I just see you every morning when I open my eyes?*
*Can I just feel your heart beating beside me every night?*
*Can we just feel this way together ‘til the end of all time?*
*Can I just spend my life with you?*

“I’ve never heard that song before, but my answer is ‘yes’ to all four of those questions. Yes, yes, yes, and yes.”

Kurt smiled and chuckled. “It’s actually a duet. You could learn it and we could sing it together sometime.”

Sebastian kissed him sweetly. “I’d be honored.”

“Let’s sit back down for a few minutes.” Kurt stepped back toward the bench. He sat down and bent his left knee and turned so that he was sitting half criss-cross facing Sebastian. “I bought rings, but I had also considered the option of a tattoo on our ring fingers, but I didn’t know how you’d feel about that. You don’t seem to be bothered by mine, but that doesn’t mean that you’d like one of your own.”

“I’m not opposed to the idea. What made you consider tattoos?”

“Well, during combat class and during performances I can’t wear a ring. They make stage makeup that could cover over a tattoo during a performance.”

“That makes sense. So, you have rings?”

“I do. I looked around in New York and didn’t really find anything that jumped out at me. I decided to look after we got here. I went out the day that you went with Celeste and Grandmère to the bank.”
“Do you have the rings with you?”

“Yes.” Kurt pulled a ring box out of his satchel and opened it, showing it to Sebastian.

“Oh, wow. That’s unusual, but I like it. What is the stone or inlaid piece?”

“It’s actually Roman glass.”

“Real Roman glass?”

“Yes. Each ring is unique because they’re handmade.”

“Will you show me the other one?”

“Sure.” He took the other ring box out of his satchel and opened it.

Sebastian took the box and compared the rings. “The glass color is slightly different but the size of the ‘stone’ area of the rings is pretty close to the same. And they’re not the same design, but they have a similar feel and them. Some rope and a little scrollwork or twists and the look of multiple bands or rings that meld together on the back. The glass is a mixture of greens and blues. They’re really interesting to look at.”

“When I saw them, I just felt this connection to them for both of us. It’s this beautiful piece of wearable art that’s been made from something that was broken. The glass is mostly blue and green and it also reminded me of us. And even though it can never be put back together the way it was or be what it used to be, it’s been put together in a way that’s really beautiful still.”

Sebastian wiped his eyes and handed his ring back to Kurt. “Will you put mine on me?” He held out his hand.

Kurt took the box from him and pulled the ring out. “You’re sure? You can have a different ring or no ring.”

“I want this ring that you picked out for me.” He continued to hold out his hand.

Kurt took the ring out and slipped it onto Sebastian’s finger.

“Can I put yours on you?”

“You can. Or you can pick something out yourself, if you want.”

Sebastian opened the ring box back up and took the ring out. “You put a lot of thought and care into finding rings and choosing these particular rings for us, and I really like them. I love what you see in them and how you related it to us.” He took Kurt’s hand and slid the ring on his finger. He brought Kurt’s hand up to his mount and kissed his knuckles before he interlaced their fingers and put their hands on his leg. “I love you so much.”

Kurt leaned toward him with a smile that flashed through his eyes. Sebastian leaned in as well. They met in the middle and they kissed.

“I love you too.”

“Tell me about how your ring search. What other things did you find along the way?”

“Well, I was looking for something non-traditional and unique. First, back in New York, I looked at spoon rings made from actual antique silver spoons. I liked the historical aspect and the
individuality of the rings, but I kept looking. I also looked at signet rings, but to be honest, the ones I liked were antique ones, and were obviously handmade from their uniqueness and lack of perfection. Unfortunately, they were just weren’t what I was looking for exactly, and even if they had been, they were WAY out of my price range.”

Sebastian laughed. “I bet. I’ve seen photos of some of the really cool signet rings in history books.”

“I saw these rings Monday and they just had this Old World feeling to them. They’re individually crafted and the glass is obviously slightly different in each one. They came with authentication papers on the Roman glass in them. I left those back at Aunt Celeste’s. I just liked how they aren’t perfect, but they’re really beautiful, yet completely masculine. And I already told you how they made me think of us.”

“I agree. They are really beautiful and yet still very masculine. Will you put this ring box back in your bag? I didn’t bring my bag with me when we left.”

Kurt took it from him.

“Scoot closer to me. I want to take a picture of us here.”

“Slide your leg behind me so I can lean up against your chest.” He scooted closer to Sebastian and toward the front of the bench.

Sebastian repositioned himself.

“Let me hold your phone. Wrap your arms around me and hold me close. I’ll hold the phone out and take the picture.”

They got in a good position and Kurt took a few photos.

He held it where they could both see. “We look good,” Kurt said.

“We do. You look especially happy.”

“The man I love said he wants to marry me. How could I not be happy?” He shifted forward a little and turned his head and kissed Sebastian.

Sebastian took his phone back. “If it’s okay with you, I’m going to post this one to our Facebook pages and send it to your parents, Sam, Isabelle and Grandma with a ‘Happy New Year!’ note.”

“Sure. Your ring can be seen in the picture, but mine can’t. That will prevent it from being a subtle engagement announcement. Do you want to tell the five of them that we’re engaged?”

“Of course, but if you want to wait and do it in person, we can do that, but other than Isabelle, it will be a while before we see the other three.”

“Maybe we can just send the photo and the New Year’s greeting for now. It’s a little after 3am there right now. They won’t read the email for at least five hours. We can Skype them from Aunt Celeste’s using the WiFi later today and tell them. That’s as close to in person as we can get for a long time since we don’t have any plans to go to Ohio any time soon.”

Sebastian held Kurt close. “Why wouldn’t I want to tell people?” He kissed Kurt on the cheek before he released him. “Come on. Let’s get up and move. Just sitting here is starting to get too cold.”
“Do you want to go for a walk and talk or go back to Aunt Celeste’s?”

“Let’s walk around the neighborhood a little, and then head back. One more kiss first?”

“Of course.”

They kissed until they were breathless.

Sebastian opened his eyes and met Kurt’s. “We’re engaged.”

“We are.”

Sebastian leaned forward and kissed him again. “Ready?”

Kurt grabbed their cups. “Lead the way.” He tossed them in the trash once as they exited the park. Once his hands were empty, he reached for Sebastian’s hand and took it. “As for why you wouldn’t want to tell people, I don’t know, but I don’t want to make assumptions. I don’t want you to feel pressured in any way.”

“How long have you been planning this? You said went ring shopping in New York.”

“About a month.”

“Really?”

“Mmm hmm.”

“Well, it was perfect. And I don’t feel pressured at all. I feel calm and excited. Maybe calm isn’t the right word.” He thought for a few seconds. “I feel secure and settled and exceptionally enthusiastic about it.”

Kurt laughed. “As oxymoronic as that sounds, it’s a perfect description.”

“I love hearing you laugh.”

“Well, that’s a good thing because I feel happy around you.” He squeezed Sebastian’s hand. “I’d like to get married here.”

“Really?”

“Yes. We only have five people that I would want to be at the wedding in the States. My parents could afford it as long as didn’t spring it on them at the last minute and they could stay with one of your family members. Sam would be the only one who wouldn’t be able to come up with the money easily. And you have close to 40 family members here, plus any family friends or other people you’d want to invite. And the off-chance that any of my family that’s here would want to come.”

“Keep in mind, though, that everyone here is used to a 2-part wedding. Everyone has to get married at the mairie, and then most people have a wedding ceremony after that. So, technically we could get married in New York, bring the paperwork with us here to the mairie to officially record and file it, and then have a wedding here with everyone.”

“So, we’d just have my parents, Isabelle, Grandma Smythe, and Sam go with us to have a civil ceremony at the courthouse, or wherever it’s done in New York?”

“We could. It’s an option, if getting the other five here turns out to be an issue.”
Kurt glanced at him while they walked. He had the big grin on his face again.

“You look like the cat that got cream instead of skim milk in his bowl.”

“I AM the cat that got cream.” He stepped closer to Kurt and let go of his hand so that he could wrap his arm around Kurt’s shoulders.

Kurt wrapped his arm around Sebastian’s waist. “Make that two cats with a bowl full of cream,” he teased.

“I think this calls for a mid-morning celebration dessert. I know just the place, if it’s open.”

A couple of hours after they had left, they returned to Celeste’s place and let themselves back inside. Celeste and André were nowhere to be seen. Kurt and Sebastian hung their coats up in the closet in their room. Kurt turned around from hanging his up to find Sebastian lying on his back in the bed with his boots off. He patted the bed inviting Kurt to join him.

Kurt went around the bed slipped his boots off and lay down next to Sebastian, who turned on his side and waited for Kurt to move his arm so he could snuggle up with his head on Kurt’s chest. Sebastian placed his hand on Kurt’s heart. Kurt put his left hand over the top of Sebastian’s. Kurt ran his fingers through the back of Sebastian’s hair, causing him to make noises between moaning and purring in pleasure.

“You said you had been thinking about ring tattoos. Did you do any drawings?”

“I did. I’ll show you when we get up or whenever you want to see them. Are you sure you’re okay with this? Unless your family is out of the norm, it seems that couples here don’t get engaged for a long time.”

“I guess that’s true.”

“On the walk back when we were talking about telling people I realized that I hadn’t really considered the cultural implications. I apologize for that. Now that I actually think about it, Georges and Letti are just now moving in together, and they’ve been together for four years, three years as adults, and they aren’t engaged. Patrice and Leon had been together for three plus years when they got engaged. Is your family going to think I’ve jumped the gun? Will they be secretly upset by my abrupt proposal?”

“Well, I think one main difference is that Georges and Letti were both still living with their parents while they were in school. No rent, no expenses. It’s not like they were living on their own and moving in together would have saved them money. It allowed them to not have to work. If they had moved in together before now, they would have had to work while they were going to school. And living expenses are as high here as they are in New York, so they would have had to work close to full-time to live together. And that’s not impossible, but a Bachelor’s degree is completed in three years here, rather than four, so the coursework is pretty intense. They would have had no time to spend together. Now that they’ve both been working for several months, they were able to save up to move out and live together. Patrice finished an enormous amount of schooling in a short period of time and living at home made more sense than dragging that out and working at the same time. She and Leon got engaged and she moved in with him not that long after finishing her degree. Our situation is different. We’ve already been living together for 13 months. I never specified to anyone that we had only become a couple right before we came this summer.”
“So, there’s a good chance that everyone thinks that we were together for an extended period of time before I moved in with you?”

“I didn’t lie to anyone. No one actually asked. I hadn’t been keeping in contact with anyone really. You knew that. They probably just think you were part of my life during the time period when I wasn’t keep in contact with them. By the time I came last winter, you were already living with me. And given the somberness of the time when I was here last year, no one really grilled me on our relationship status or where you slept.”

“That makes sense. And no one has ever actually asked.”

“Right – because it’s private. They did ask when we met and we honestly answered that we met in Ohio and that we were both 18 at the time. As much as PDA is commonplace, people’s romantic lives aren’t really a common topic of conversation. Like I would never consider asking when Georges and Letti first had sex. It’s like everyone knows it’s a normal part of life. It’s not as taboo here, so it’s not as titillating? I’m not sure. No one knows when we became a couple. People don’t make big deals out of little things like month-iversaries, like I’ve heard people talk about in the States. Maybe it’s because once a couple is a couple, it’s seen as a permanent situation. Whereas, it seems to me that in the States that a couple’s relationship status isn’t stable until they’re engaged. I don’t know. From what I’ve seen, which I’ll admit isn’t much, it seems like people here are more realistic. They go into a relationship seeing it as a commitment and something that they have to work at to make it a good relationship. I guess what I’ve seen in the States is one or both of the parties being really reckless with how they treat the whole situation.”

“More of a ‘Let’s try this out and see.’ versus ‘I’m going to put my all into making this work.’”

“Yeah. And I know that’s being very broad and generalizing a lot. You’re not like that. You’re an ‘all in’ kind of guy. And there are other people like that, but I don’t think they’re viewed as the norm.”

“I agree, which is why I kept asking you questions the night you told me how you felt because I don’t do casual sex or friends-with-benefits type of relationships. I wasn’t aware of any of the cultural differences then. I needed to know that you were ‘all in’ as well.”

Sebastian tipped his head back and kissed Kurt on the neck. “I know, mon feu. You were scared, but you took a chance on me. You gave me the chance to prove to you that I can be trusted.”

Kurt kissed the top of his head. “I do trust you. I’m not scared anymore. Like you said earlier I feel secure and settled and I want to grow old with you. I want to travel with you. I want sit on our sofa and snuggle and read with you. I want you to sit behind me and hold me close while we drink coffee in the mornings. I want to dance with you. I want to lie close to you and just be with you.”

“I want all of that too. When were you thinking of getting married?”

“I had considered spring break, but that wouldn’t give us very long here. After graduation is a possibility. I’m not 100% set on a date or anything. I just know that I want it to be something we enjoy, not something that we fight over.” Kurt kissed the top of his head and interlaced their fingers. “If the process and planning isn’t enjoyable for both of us, I would rather go down to the courthouse, just the two of us with Sam as our witness, and have a quick legal ceremony and get back to enjoying our lives together.” He continued to run his fingers through Sebastian’s hair as he talked. “No decorations or themes or venues are worth being upset with you. What typically happens when a couple gets engaged?”

“Well, in religious families, I guess it’s probably still traditional for the groom to talk to the bride’s
family ahead of time and get their blessing ahead of time. After that, there’s usually a small church ceremony and a family party. I don’t think there’s any equivalent event in the States. I’ve heard about these engagement parties, but I’ve never been to one. Our family isn’t religious and even if they were, we wouldn’t have a church ceremony because the two of us aren’t religious. And even if we were, the church wouldn’t allow it. The whole engagement ceremony thing is mostly to give the close family members a chance to meet each other, and in the past to give the families a chance to approve or disapprove of the pairing. I remember something about the woman not being able to wear the ring until after both families had approved of their engagement. I’m not sure how much of that still goes on. The things I’ve heard are from stories that Aunt Celeste, Aunt Louise, and Aunt Vivienne have told.”

“I see.”

“Matthieu and Suzanne got married when I was about 12, I think. I wasn’t really paying any attention. I don’t recall any type of engagement party that I was a part of. I did go to their wedding. Fernand and Joanna and Simone and Garren got married when I was in Ohio. I met Joanna and Garren when I was here last winter. And Patrice and Leon got engaged before we came last summer. So, I’m as out of the loop about what is expected as you are.”

“Okay.”

“And even if there’s still some archaic tradition of asking the father of the bride for the bride’s hand in marriage, neither one of us will be brides. The only parent involved in our lives is your dad. And as far as I can tell, he already approves of me.”

“He approves, so does Carole. Not that I’ve told them anything about asking you to marry me. I just know that they both really like you.”

“We can Skype with your parents, Sam, Isabelle, and Grandma later like we had already said.”

“I don’t want anyone to feel obligated to host a party. All of us were already together last weekend and we’ll be together for Patrice and Leon’s wedding. I’d rather the focus be on them before their wedding. Maybe we should go over to Grandmère’s and tell her first?”

“That’s a good idea. But I have another good idea.”

“What’s that?”

“You roll over and face me and we kiss.”

Sebastian scooted back a bit and Kurt rolled onto his side. He started their little kissing game, causing Sebastian to laugh. It didn’t take Sebastian long to cave and kiss Kurt for real, still smiling. They lay in each other’s arms, lost in the pure pleasure of kissing.

Sebastian’s phone alarm went off. He rolled over and picked it up. “As much as this is what I really want to do, your proposal completely pushed our plans for today right out of my head. We’re supposed to be at Georges and Letti’s new place at 1:00 to help them assemble everything they’re having delivered from Ikea.”

“We need to leave, don’t we? Are we already late?”

“Nope. It’s just 11:30, but we need to change into the most comfortable clothes that we brought with us.”

“Sweats it is.” He scooted over and crawled on top of Sebastian and pinned him to the bed and
kissed him. “We’ll continue this later.”

“I’d rather continue it now. We have to undress anyway.” He pulled Kurt’s shirt untucked and ran his hands along Kurt’s lower back.

“You’re right. Now’s good.” He pushed up onto his knees and began to unbutton Sebastian’s shirt.


“Better than okay, much better,” Sebastian said, cheerfully. “Where’s the truck?”

“Later than you,” she teased. “What’s going on?”

He stepped closer to Kurt and wrapped his arm around him. He glanced his direction and Kurt smiled at him, stepping even closer and leaning into his side.

“Kurt asked me to marry him this morning.”

“That’s great!”

“What’s great?” Georges asked, as he came around the corner carrying a box.

“Kurt asked Sebastian to marry him. They’re engaged.”

Georges sat the box down and pulled Sebastian into a hug. Sebastian was clearly surprised, but hugged him back. “You deserve all the happiness in the world. I’m so glad for the two of you. We saw how good the two of you were together this summer. I was so excited for you that you finally had something – someone good in your life.”

Letti looked at Georges and he nodded.

“This morning when we came to flat, we went upstairs and as soon as I closed the door behind us and turned around, Georges was one knee and he proposed.” She took her glove off and showed Kurt and Sebastian her ring.

“It’s beautiful, Letti,” Kurt said. He stepped closer and hugged her. “Did you talk about a date?”

“No, not yet. We’re just super excited to finally be living together.”

“There’s the truck,” Georges said. “I’m going to run this up. I’ll be right back down.”

The delivery guys carried the larger boxes up. The other four took turns carrying the other boxes up. A half-hour later, everything was inside their flat.

Kurt looked around once everything was in. The flat was rectangular with the narrow front wall being comprised of a double window that was half window, half door that led out to a small balcony. The door into the flat was in the back right corner of the room, and opened back to the left against a short wall. Behind the door was the door to the bathroom. Due to its small size, the door opened outward. Other than the bathroom being a small room off the left side, taking up a corner of the floor space, the rest of the flat was open space with no closets or cabinets of any type.

Letti was super excited and gave them a tour. She opened the bathroom door. “It’s really cool because the previous owners redid the bathroom. We can fit a washing machine in that open cabinet under the sink. And the shower is fabulous.” She came back out of the bathroom and
stood in the center of the room. She pointed to the wall that ran along the bathroom. The small wall the bathroom door was on extended a couple of feet past the door, creating an alcove along the side of the wall that faced the room. “That’s going to be the kitchen area. The fridge is going in the corner. The sink will be in the middle and a stove on the end.” She turned and pointed to the left wall when facing the windows. “This whole side of the wall is going to be cabinets and storage.” She pointed to the opposite wall. “This will have the convertible sectional.”

“What do you want to do first?” Kurt asked, nearly matching her level of enthusiasm.

“The sectional will be last. I’d like it if you and Sebastian could put the kitchen cabinets together first because we can’t move in until we can eat here. I didn’t want to ask you two to paint because I don’t want you to mess up your clothes. That’s what was in the box that Georges brought up. We’re going to leave the kitchen area white except the small part that will show at the top of the cabinets. We’re going to get those cool glass tiles and tile the wall area between the countertops and the cabinets. We’re going to paint the rest of the room a really pale turquoise. We’re not going to waste paint on the wall with all of the cabinets. We’ll just paint the part at the top and the small section that will show where we have to leave space for the refrigerator door to open back.”

Kurt and Sebastian nodded. Everyone looked through the stack of boxes to find all of the pieces to the storage units to move them to one area. They stacked all of the boxes for the sectional in one area as well.

“If anyone has a sewing machine, you could pick out some nice looking king-sized sheets and I could turn them into curtains.”

“We actually bought curtains that we like, but they’re for narrower windows. I bought two packs. I was going to take them to a tailor or just leave them hang in three sections. We don’t need the fourth panel, but they came in sets of two. Could you sew the three panels together?”

“More than likely.”

“That would be amazing if you can. I’m pretty sure that Aunt Vivienne still has a sewing machine.”

About an hour later, Patrice and Leon showed up to help. They began assembling the top cabinets for the kitchen area. Once they had gotten all of the cabinets assembled, the top of the wall was dry enough to start the installation. Leon had borrowed tools from a friend and Patrice oversaw the process, knowing exactly how to do it and making a good foreman by explaining what Kurt and Sebastian needed to do.

By 7:00, they were all hungry and tired. They ordered pizzas from a place nearby and sat around on the floor eating them after they were delivered.

Georges looked around. “It’s starting to look like what we had imagined.”

Letti leaned up against him and smiled. “It really is. I really like the pale turquoise. We saw some other places we liked that actually had a bedroom, but we couldn’t afford that. Prices here are insane. I’m sure they are in New York as well.”

“They are,” Kurt said. “In Manhattan a place like this would be probably $2000-2500 a month, depending on its exact location. The first place I lived in New York was $1800 and it was bigger, but it was empty. Brick walls, a wood floor, and a tiny bathroom. We had to put in appliances and stuff like you are, but it was a rental. And it was a 45-minute train ride, not counting the walk to and from the subway stations. We put up curtains for the room dividers. It was not a good living
situation."

“You said you two met in high school,” Letti said curiously.

Kurt answered. “We did. Bas was at the private boarding school I had gone to the year before, which was about 90 minutes from where I actually lived. I had gone back to the school in my own district the year he started there. We were in rival show choirs, but since I had gone there the year before, we had quite a few mutual acquaintances.”

Sebastian added. “I didn’t really make any friends that year. I wasn’t in the right mindset to put any effort towards reaching out.”

Everyone nodded.

“I graduated and moved to New York at the end of the summer after that school year and got a job at Vogue working for Isabelle. He had another year left of high school. I knew she was from Ohio, but I didn’t find out for a while that she was Sebastian’s father’s first cousin. We met up again after he moved to New York.”

Patrice said, “Is one of you two going to enlighten us as to why you’re wearing very similar rings that you didn’t have on last night?”

“Kurt and I are engaged.”

“Congratulations! That’s exciting. Who all knows?” she asked.

“Well, we told Letti and Georges when we got here. We went to Grandmère’s place on the way here, which is why we were late.”

Letti said, “It’s okay. You got here before the truck, which is what counts.”

Sebastian asked, “Who all knows about the two of you?”

“I told Patrice, of course. But Georges and I haven’t been to see our parents yet because we had to go get this stuff this morning. We’ll tell them tonight.”

“You four and Grandmère are the only ones that know. We’ll Skype Kurt’s parents and my grandma and Isabelle when we get back to Aunt Celeste’s.”

Patrice examined Letti’s ring. “It’s really beautiful, Letti. I know you always wanted a gorgeous opal ring and Georges did a good job.”

He smiled. “I just paid attention when she saw rings that she liked.”

“Paying attention is a good thing,” Patrice said. She turned and took Sebastian’s hand. “Your rings look like Roman glass.”

“Yes,” Kurt said.

“You got these here in Paris, didn’t you?”

“I did. Earlier this week. I looked a lot of rings in New York and didn’t find what I was looking for.”

She took his hand next. “I like how they really are similar, yet completely different, but from a distance, they look alike.”
“Thanks.”

Kurt got up the nerve to ask. “I may be half French, but I really have no experience with day-to-day life here other than the time I spent last summer. What happens after a couple gets engaged here? What will your parents do once you tell them this evening?”

Letti said, “It’s not going to shock them or anything. We just bought a flat together. The only thing that will be a surprise is how he did it and what my ring looks like. As for what they will do – they’ll probably just have dinner with Stella and Tristan and the two of us. We might talk about a timeline at some point, but maybe not.”

“So, there won’t be a big engagement party or anything?”

She said, “I think that type of thing is something that some people do with their friends, but I don’t know anyone personally who has had one. Maybe older people who aren’t really close to their families? I’m not sure, but we’re not having one.”

Patrice said, “When we got engaged, our parents got together at Leon’s parents’ place and the six of us had dinner. We told them about me moving with Leon and we told them that we’d start considering dates once we’d lived together for several months and looked into ideas and options.”

Georges said, “Enough relaxing. There are more cabinets to put together.”

Letti encouraged them by saying, “Now that there are six of us working on them, it should go faster.”

Kurt took a deep breath, and then let it out slowly. He ran his fingers through Sebastian’s hair and kissed him on the top of his head.

From his cozy spot on Kurt’s chest, Sebastian asked, “What are you thinking about?”

“You, us. Just relaxing. And thinking. They had to get really creative with only having about 200 sq. feet. Setting the benches for the table at the end of the sectional like end tables and getting that table that folds down on both sides and is only like 10 inches across was a great choice. I’m excited to go back and help them finish getting everything put together and in place.”

“I’ll take you to Aunt Vivienne’s tomorrow morning. Once you’ve finished sewing the curtains, you can come to Georges and Letti’s. I’ll leave you with my phone so you can make sure not to get lost or call Georges if something changes. Are you sure you want to spend the afternoon working on their place? We don’t have to. You can bring the curtains and we can go do something else.”

“I really like them. Do you not want to spend the day at their new place again?”

“Yes and no. I really do want to, but it makes me remember working on putting everything together in New York by myself. I had just started to see the therapist that Isabelle set me up with. I hadn’t even opened up to Isabelle much at that point – just enough to be friendly-ish since she was trying to help me. Building all of their stuff with the rest of you is so much fun, but it does bring that time in my life back to the forefront of my mind. But the ‘yes’ part of my answer is the real answer. It’s just hard for me to believe that things are so different. I never considered that I might find someone who could seamlessly fit into my family here. It’s like a dream sometimes.”

Kurt brought Sebastian’s hand to his lips and kissed his knuckles. “Well, you’re aren’t imagining
things, but I do understand that feeling. The thought that I’d find someone who loves the real me is hard enough for me to believe, but that your family accepts me is doubly hard to believe. Every day that we’re here makes me want to stay all the more. Are there other people you’d like to spend time with?"

“Georges and Letti and Noelle and Patrice have been my closest friends for a long time. We went to the same schools, and except for Patrice, we were in the same class throughout the lower grades. And I’m not sure if you remember because I probably only said it that once when I first drew the family tree for you, Aunt Celeste and my grandma were very close and when she died, Aunt Celeste pretty much took my mom in as her own daughter. She included me and my mom in everything she planned for her own two kids, their spouses, and kids. Damien was enough younger than us that we’d play with him when we were all at George’s and at family gatherings here, but we never included him when we ran around with our friends because he was just a kid. He was 9 when we started high school. When I left, he was 12. Patrice was ahead of us in school. But like I said, she wasn’t super social and she hung out with us rather than kids in her grade. She started college the year the rest of us started high school. We had other friends that were in our grade, but when I went to Ohio I didn’t keep in contact with them either. When we came last summer, it was like a huge reunion plus an amazing vacation with you. I loved every minute of it and I didn’t really feel the need to reconnect with anyone else at the time because there was the underlying feeling that it might be the last time I got to come for a long time. It was more important to me for the two of us to travel together and to spend the rest of the time with family. But if we’re going to be able to come more frequently, I might be more inclined to look people up. I’m not sure. By the time we could come back again, five years will have passed since I spent any time with anyone I was friends with back then. I’ve changed in that five years. Of course, I’m still myself, but I’m not that happy-go-lucky 17 year old they knew anymore. I’m a grown man, who has been through a lot and come out the other side of a really dark period to be happy and whole again. If we ever decide to move back here to stay, we’ll both meet new people and I might run into old friends and rekindle a friendship with some of them, if it seems like an adult friendship is a possibility.”

“That makes a lot of sense.” Kurt reached over and picked his phone up. “It’s almost 11:30. Are you ready to Skype everyone?”

He tipped his head back and Kurt tipped his head down to kiss him. “Sure.”

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“You two were up and about early this morning,” Carole said.

“We got up fairly early this morning, but it’s weird because the sunrise is so late here this time of year. That picture we sent was taken about 9:00, which was only 15 minutes after sunrise.”

“Oh, wow,” Carole said. “That is a late sunrise.”

“And it’s dark by a little after 5:00,” Kurt said.

“Did you have a fun New Year’s Eve?”

Kurt nodded. “We did. We went to see the fireworks down near the Eiffel Tower. It was amazing, but super crowded.”

“I like the picture. You both looked really happy. I’m going to print it.”

“Is Dad around?”
“Yeah, he’s watching the Rose Bowl or the Cotton Bowl? I’m sure he told me who is playing, but I’ve forgotten.”

“Those games go all day. There’s like four in a row. Is it close to half time?”

“There are actually five today and three of them were on at the same time. THAT I remember.”

“I’m sure Dad fussed about the need to change between channels.”

She rolled her eyes. “I’ll go see if I can pry him away.” She moved out of the camera range.

A few minutes later, they both into view.

“Hey, Dad.”

“Happy New Year’s. Did you two do anything exciting? I know it’s late at night there already.”

“Did you see the picture we sent?” Kurt asked.

“I did. You look happy – like you’re having a good time over there.”

“We are.”

“We took that picture a few minutes after I asked Sebastian to marry me.”

“You’re engaged?” Carole asked excitedly. “You did say ‘yes’, right, Sebastian?”

“I said ‘yes’,” he said with a huge grin on his face. “Of course I said ‘yes’.”

“Congratulations!” she said. “I’m so excited for you.”

“Thanks,” Kurt said. “We’re excited too.”

Burt said, “Well, I can’t say that I wasn’t expecting that at some point because I was. Have you thought about when?”

“I want to get married here. We haven’t set a date or anything, and I know that plane tickets don’t grow on trees. But Sebastian has a lot of relatives here and I have five. You know that I’ve been keeping in contact with Mémé Jacqueline and Aunt Danielle. We’d want you two, Grandma Smythe, Isabelle, and Sam to be at the wedding. I’m sure that Sebastian’s Aunt Celeste will let you stay here with us. She has three bedrooms. Sam can sleep on the couch here, if necessary. We can work it out. All of Sebastian’s great aunts and uncles have an empty bedroom and over half of his aunts and uncles do. The other half still have kids living at home.”

“I’d LOVE to go to Paris!” Carole said enthusiastically.

“We’ll work on it, bud. It’ll work out. You two are happy together. That’s what matters.”

“Thanks, Dad. You can go back to watching the Rose Bowl. We need to call Grandma Smythe and Isabelle too.”

“Alright. Congratulations. We’ll talk again soon.” He moved away from the camera view.

Carole said, “I won’t keep you two since it’s so late here and you need to make more calls. Thanks for calling and telling us. You’re so good together. I’m really excited for you two.”
“Thanks,” they said in unison.

Kurt said, “We’ll talk soon.”

“Bye.”

Kurt turned to Sebastian and kissed him on the cheek. He squirmed and ran his hand across the area.

“That tickles.”

“Ah, the perils of the beard. I might have to try it out on your ribs.”

Sebastian covered his ribs protectively. “You wouldn’t.”

“I might…”

Sebastian laughed. “Maybe just a little bit.”

“You know if you don’t like it, I’ll stop.”

“I do know.” He rearranged a little bit and kissed Kurt. “Grandma or Isabelle next?”

“Well, in theory, we could do both at the same time if we both connect to the internet and make separate calls.”

“We can try.”

Kurt got his phone out of his backpack, where he kept most of the time because he didn’t have an international calling plan. “Alright. Let’s see what happens. I’ll Skype Isabelle.”

Grandma Smythe picked up first.

“Hello, Sebastian, dear.”

“Happy New Year, Grandma.”

“To you as well. And Kurt. That was a lovely photo of the two of you I got this morning. I take it that you’re enjoying your visit.”

“We are.”

Isabelle called back after having missed Kurt’s call.

“Hey, Isabelle. Sebastian has Grandma on his phone. It’s our makeshift way to do a conference call using Skype. Happy New Year.”

“Happy New Year to you. So, why are you two calling both of us at the same time?”

Sebastian was the one to answer this time. “Kurt asked me to marry him this morning. We took that picture we sent this morning right afterwards.”

“Well, that would explain why the two of you were grinning like loons,” Isabelle said.

“I told them it was a lovely photo,” Grandma Smythe said.

“Oh, it is, Grandma. They just looked extra happy in it, and not in a cheesy Happy New Year’s
way. Congratulations!"

"Yes, dears. I’m happy for the two of you. You’re not eloping while you’re there are you?"

"No, Grandma, but we would like to get married here. We’d like you two and Kurt’s parents and Sam to come here."

"Sebastian has so many relatives here that he would like to be part of the wedding."

"I understand, dear. I’m not sure that I’m up for a flight to France, but we’ll see. Isabelle, your parents, and Sam could make the trip easily. I’m assuming that you’ve told them."

"We just hung up from talking to Kurt’s parents. We’ve only told four of my cousins and my Grandmère so far here. We’ll tell the rest of them as we see them."

Isabelle said, "Well, as soon as I know what you want to wear for this most amazing occasion, I will start looking into finding it for you."

"Thanks, Isabelle."

"It’s nearly midnight over there," she said. "I won’t keep you up. We can talk more when you get back."

"Yes, Isabelle is right. Thank you for calling and sharing your good news, dears. Good night."

"Good night," they said in unison, and disconnected both calls.

Kurt pressed Sam’s name.

"Hey, Kurt. Happy New Year!"

"Thanks."

Sebastian moved closer to Kurt.

"Hey, Sebastian."

"Hey, yourself. We called to tell you something besides Happy New Year."

"What’s that?"

"Kurt asked me marry him this morning."

"I KNEW it! Congratulations!"

Stacey came into the camera viewing range. "You knew what, Sammy?"

"Kurt and Sebastian got engaged."

"That’s cool!" She ran off again.

Kurt laughed. "That was quick."

Sam said, "I’m happy for the two of you. My good news is that my family likes Lexi. She got here two days ago. That’s where Stacey ran off to – to go back to playing with Lexi."

"That is good news. I won’t keep you. It’s nearly midnight here already."
“Get some sleep. Thanks for calling and telling me.”

“Of course, we called to tell you,” Kurt said. “You’re our best friend. We’ll see you soon, I hope.”

Sebastian said, “That wasn’t a hint. That’s a request.”

“Got it. I’ll come for the weekend soon. I promise. See ya.” He disconnected the call.

“We need to get some sleep. I have curtains to sew in the morning and you have cabinets to put together.”

He took Kurt’s phone and put it with his and crawled across the bed and sat in Kurt’s lap. He ran his thumb across Kurt’s lower lip. “Ah, but right now, I have these perfect lips to kiss.” He kissed Kurt, and they kissed until they were breathless.

“You make a valid point there.” He pulled Sebastian towards him and resumed the kissing.

When Kurt arrived the next day a little after noon, all of the storage cabinets were put together and were in place. The curtain rod was up. Kurt, Sebastian, and Georges worked together to hang the large curtain up.

Once they let her open her eyes, Letti exclaimed, “I love it! I like how it doesn’t have any gaps now. We just need a way to be able to open it all the way back more easily.”

“All we need is a dowel rod. We can cut it and use the drill to put a hole in it and fasten it to the curtain. Or maybe you can buy one. At our hardware stores, they sell clear acrylic ones as replacements for the ones that come with blinds.”

“I’ll have to look,” she said. “Next up, the sectional.”

They got the directions out and stacked the boxes for each part together. Noelle and Edmond arrived about ten minutes later. Letti opened the door and let them in.

“Oh, my!” Noelle hugged her. “Letti, it already looks so perfect in here. Just like what you had described. I love those curtains.”

“Thank you. You’re just in time to help us put the sectional together.”

They divided up into two groups and got to work on the two sections. Once they had finally finished, they moved the two parts into position. They all stepped back and looked around. The dark royal blue sectional was the same color as the darkest blue in the curtains, which had a white background with three colors of blue geometric shapes. The pale turquoise walls were the color of the palest blue in the curtains.

“It looks so nice,” Letti said. “All that’s left is that stuff.” She pointed to another pile of boxes. “We have the shoe cabinet that’s going to go on this wall.” She pointed to the small wall the bathroom door was on. “And the table still needs assembled. I also have coat hooks to put on the wall by the door. After that, all we have left is to paint the doors the same color of white as the cabinets, but we can do that tomorrow.”

Georges went over to the stack and pulled one of the boxes off and handed it to Sebastian. He and Kurt got busy assembling the shoe cabinet, while the others worked on the other two projects. Once they had the cabinet together, they got it fastened to the wall.
“We’re going to need to get going,” Sebastian said. “We need to get back to Aunt Celeste’s and change to go to dinner with Kurt’s family.”

“It’s looks really great in here. When the appliances are delivered Monday, this place will be perfect,” Kurt said.

“Thanks for all of your help,” Letti said. “I hope you have a nice time at your aunt and uncle’s.”

“My grandma’s been slowly coming around. Old ideas are hard to overcome and the shock of all of it was a lot to take in when I was here this summer. We’ve been corresponding here and there. I send her emails about what I’m involved in and doing and she’s sent me a few emails back. We’re making progress. I can’t imagine being in her position. I mean I know I was surprised to find out that she was alive and that I had other relatives, but that was a good surprise. I can’t imagine living all those years thinking her child had died about 15 years after she thought she had.”

“Hatred is so awful,” Letti said.

Edmond looked very confused.

“You guys can tell Edmond the story. We need to go so we aren’t late.”

They grabbed their coats and waved to everyone as they left.

After dinner, the seven of them moved to the living room. Clara and Victor took their dining chairs with them, placed them in front of the TV, facing the sofa, and sat down. Kurt and Sebastian sat in the love seat, leaving the sofa to Mémé Jacqueline, Danielle, and Gabriel.

Mémé Jacqueline nodded to Victor, who got up and got a book off a nearby shelf and gave it to Kurt. He sat back down.

“Go ahead and open it, just briefly so you can see better what it is. Clara and Victor helped me with it. I didn’t want to give up my original photos and things I had saved that Elizabeth had drawn or composed, but they took the originals and turned them into that book. I also wrote out some stories from when she was growing up and they typed them in. I included the ones I had already sent you. I don’t have any idea how all of that technology works, but it came out really nice.”

Kurt opened it up and saw some baby photos and flipped through a few more pages. He saw drawings and some poems. He closed the book and sat it next to him on the end table. “Thank you.” He wiped his eyes. “I will read every word.” He looked at Clara and Victor. “Thank you for taking the time to do this for me.”

“You’re welcome,” Victor said.

“I have a little tablet I can use for emails and watching shows that they got for me last Christmas, but I’m not very good at most of it. They let me use their laptops to open the video files you sent of your performances. Despite having no idea what you were saying, your talent is quite obvious. You have a lovely voice.”

“Thank you.”

“I know all of this is still difficult. And none of us really knows how to make it easier,” Danielle said. “We’d really like to know about your life. What was your childhood like? How did you spend
Kurt nodded. “Okay. I guess I can tell you about some of that, but I’d rather it not just be a one-way conversation. I’d like to get to know all of you too. Maybe we can choose a few questions and we each answer them in turn. We don’t have other plans for the evening. If you’re willing to stay for a while, we are too.”

Danielle looked around at everyone else and no one seemed to have a problem with the idea. “Alright. Maybe we can each start with…” She thought for a minute. “How about favorite childhood book and why it was your favorite.”

They went around the room and answered. When it was Mémé Jacqueline’s turn, her answer surprised everyone.

“I didn’t have a favorite book as a child or young person. We didn’t live here in Paris back then. I grew up pretty isolated and my mother taught me at home. I was only allowed to read history books or the Bible, which was in Latin. I did study some Latin, but merely enough to recite key passages my father deemed important to know. He was a very practical man, who had no time for nonsense or tomfoolery. He believed that idle hands were unacceptable. From very young, I was given chores to fill my free time. Those behaviors were deeply ingrained. I didn’t read much back then. I honestly didn’t even know about fiction books until I moved out of my parents’ home. I married Jean and moved to the closest city to where I grew up to live with him. I started to read a little more after Elizabeth got old enough to learn to read because she wanted to go to the library. I didn’t dare bring silly books home, but I would read books while we were there. Sometimes it took a long time to get through a book if someone checked it out, but I would just read part of another one and keep track of where I was on a small paper I kept in my bag. I found that I enjoyed some fantasy books or fiction books set in another time. I read mostly books for pre-teens at first. As I got better at reading, I read more advanced books. I bought a French dictionary with Jean’s permission by telling him that it was for the girls for school, but I used it myself as much as they did. I can’t really name a specific book that was my favorite, but I enjoyed books about King Arthur quite a bit.” She looked to Kurt to go next.

“Well, I had so many that I loved, but I liked books that had characters who managed to overcome the problems in their lives and succeed despite the difficulty of their situations. By the time I was 10 or so, I was already being teased and told that God hated fags and that I would burn in hell. I didn’t like the idea that there was some all-powerful being somewhere who created me and supposedly knew everything about me, but made me in a way that caused others to hate me and gave me no way to gain his approval since I couldn’t change the thing about myself that made me hated. I’m not a religious person, but I did pray for a while. Nothing changed. I wanted to be accepted. I prayed to be straight. I still liked boys and nothing I did made that stop. I even attempted to date a girl when I was older. I escaped to the worlds in the books to avoid the hatred of those around me. I hoped to one day find a place where I could be myself and I could find people who liked me and didn’t consider me to be a terrible person without even getting to know me. I kept doing the things I loved like sewing and creating clothing designs, and singing, despite being tormented for it. Fiction books helped me survive the real world.” Kurt wiped his eyes again.

Mémé Jacqueline spoke again. “My father was very strict. I moved to Paris after Jean died. Now that I am older and I’ve seen how Gabriel treats Danielle and the kids – I began to question my upbringing and hers and Elizabeth’s. I didn’t know any men who were gentle and kind. Jean was less strict than my father and he didn’t make so many demands on me or Danielle and Elizabeth. But when I went through Elizabeth’s stuff, I found those poetry books and books of drawings that she had hidden in her half of their room. I’m assuming that she had others from when she was
“She drew, but if she had books of poetry that she wrote, I’ve never seen them. I suppose it’s possible that my dad has them somewhere, but since he can’t read French, maybe he kept them to himself since he didn’t know what they said? I’ll ask. I just know that whatever happened after she left, she considered it final. She never told me that she had a sister and she told me that her parents were dead. She may very well have said ‘aren’t around anymore’ or some other euphemism since I was a child.”

“I’m assuming that Jean told her that she was no longer a member of our family and that she had no family. I have spent a lot of time thinking, trying to remember back then to see if there’s anything that he did that gave any indication that he was lying and I haven’t been able to come up with anything. He was absolutely convincing. I knew nothing about international laws about deaths of foreigners while in the United States or anything. I never questioned his statement. After you came last summer and we met, I did some inquiring. What he said could not have been the truth because it didn’t follow any of the international laws on transporting remains. But I swear that I didn’t doubt what he said back then. He was utterly convincing by being absolutely detached about the whole thing. Acting like it was just another fact of life, like water is wet. He said, ‘I told her not to go. I even forbade her to go. She didn’t listen and look what happened.’ That’s all I remember him saying about it.”

“I believe you, Mémé. I do know what it’s like to trust someone and have them utterly destroy that trust.”

“I’m sorry to know that you understand at such a young age.” She looked at Sebastian.

“No, Mémé. It wasn’t Sebastian who did it. He’s a good man.”

She nodded. “I also went to talk to some people about being gay. I’m old and I’m not well-educated. I’m learning about how to use computers, but I’m just not very good at it yet. I made my first email account after I got my tablet last Christmas. I know the church condemns being gay, just like they condemn divorce and other things. But I spoke to a few different people. One priest just showed me a couple of places in the Bible, but he didn’t really have anything other than his own opinion about it besides those few verses. I went and talked to a couple of other people – one at a support center for gay people and another at a clinic. Both of them were very informative. I wasn’t sure how to reconcile what you mentioned earlier – the Bible’s claim that God knows each of us from before we are born and the very convincing scientific research that I was provided with showing that being gay isn’t a decision – that despite many people wanting to stop being gay, nothing, even terrible things the support center told me about, has the ability to change anyone’s sexual orientation. I cried reading the stories people had written about things they did to try to stop being gay and the things that other people had done to them to make them stop. I just want you to know that the inner conflict between believing the Bible is true and believing the science and personal stories are true will no longer affect how I feel. I’m just going to leave the inability to reconcile the two in a place in my brain where I file things like not understanding how rockets work or how heart transplants work or how I can use a phone that is not plugged into anything and make phone calls or how a supercomputer fits inside that same phone. I’m an old woman and I don’t have to understand to feel the genuine hurt and pain in those stories. You’ve only mentioned that you were mistreated, and I am not asking you for details.”

“Sorry to interrupt. I just want to make sure that you realize that my father was very loving and supportive. He wasn’t one of the people that made my life miserable.”

“I didn’t think he was, but I can understand you wanting to make sure that I didn’t. As I was
saying, I am an old woman and I have been given the opportunity to be a part of your life. I am not going to squander that because I don’t understand the issue of predetermination and the science behind people being born gay and not able to choose otherwise. Protestants and Catholics have been arguing for centuries on the issues of predetermination according to that priest I talked to. I didn’t even know there was a word for the idea. If people a lot smarter than me can’t figure it out, what makes me think that I need to? I bought myself a Bible in a modern French translation and read the parts that had what Jesus taught in them. He said lots of things about loving people, especially your family, and he said lots of things about not judging people and he didn’t seem to care much for hypocrites. He said to love everybody. I may not be smart enough to understand the arguments about doctrine and all that stuff the priest talked about, but I understand perfectly fine when Jesus said the two most important things were to love God and to love everyone the way you want to be loved. Even a simple woman like me can understand that. I can do that. You are you and I want all of us to be a part of your life in any way that we can, given that you live so far from here. I don’t want you to leave this time wondering if your family accepts you. I’m not going to be part of that. I lost Elizabeth because I didn’t stand up to Jean when he threatened to disown her if she left. I won’t do that again over the fact that you love Sebastian.”

Tears were streaming down Kurt’s face. Sebastian scooted closer and wrapped his arm around Kurt’s shoulder. Kurt leaned into him. Danielle got up and brought a box of tissues out and took a couple for herself before she handed the box to Kurt and sat back down. He wiped his eyes and nose.

He took a couple of deep breaths, willing himself to stop crying enough to speak. “Thank you, Mémé.”

She got up from the sofa and walked over to the love seat and held her arms out. “I can’t undo the past, but I’m really glad that Sebastian’s uncle helped you find us.”

Kurt stood up and hugged her. “Me too.”

She stepped back and went back to sit on the sofa. She looked at Danielle and said, “I think your conversation starting topic was perfect.”

Danielle smiled and nodded. “What she said goes for the rest of us. Not that any of the rest of us had any issues with you being gay, but the part about wanting to be part of your life in any way that we can.”

Kurt nodded, and then turned toward Victor and Clara. “Can I ask you two something?”

“Sure,” Clara said.

“It’s okay if you say ‘no’, but the two of us and some of Sebastian’s cousins and their partners are going to go out to a karaoke place tomorrow evening. Are the two of you actually friends? Or do you have your own separate group of friends?”

Victor answered, “Yes, we’re actually friends. Some of our friends are mutual friends. We also have other friends that we do things with separately sometimes since we’ve made some friends in college.”

“I’ll go with you. What about you, Victor?”

“Sure. I’m an okay singer, but nothing amazing. As long as the whole place isn’t filled with people who sing like you, Kurt, I should be okay.”
Clara said, “I won’t get up and sing, but I’ll cheer for the three of you and any of Sebastian’s cousins that get up and sing. You said Sebastian’s cousins were bringing their partners. Do you want the two of us to come alone or can we bring ours?”

“Sure. Either way is fine.” Kurt had finally relaxed again. He reached over and put his hand on Sebastian’s leg. “I have something else to share with you. Sebastian and I are engaged.”

“Congratulations!” Danielle said. “I noticed the rings you’re both wearing, but I didn’t want to intrude and ask about them.”

“We’re currently hoping to have a wedding ceremony here at some point in time, but it will take some planning.”

“Of course,” Danielle said. “Weddings always take a good bit of planning.”

“We’re in the unusual situation of not hosting some type of parental get-to-know-each-other type of dinner or anything.” Kurt looked at Sebastian and he nodded. “Sebastian’s mother is also deceased, and his father disowned him for being gay. His mother’s parents are also deceased. His mother’s grandmother is still alive. His father’s grandmother and her granddaughter Isabelle are his only relatives that acknowledge him in the States. But if the five of you are interested in meeting his great aunt Celeste and her husband André, who took over the role of grandparents when his died, we’d be glad to arrange that at some point. We’re not leaving until the 17th. I’m not sure if Sebastian or his family have any other plans besides one his cousins’ wedding on the 15th, but I’m sure we can work something out. You all can talk about it later, and let me know.”

Danielle nodded. “I actually made custard for dessert, if you’d like some.”

Kurt’s eyes lit up. “Yes, please. We brought a silly game that my parents gave us for Christmas, if you’d like to try it out.”

“I’m not big on games, but I’ll be adventuresome and give it a try,” Danielle said. “Bring the chairs back to the table and we’ll learn how to play.”

An hour later, they had all enjoyed themselves rolling the pigs and laughing at the ridiculousness of the whole game. Gabriel finally spoke a bit and everyone seemed to finally relax around each other. When they had had enough, Kurt collected up the game and put it in his satchel.

They went back into the living room area and grabbed their coats. Kurt picked up the book Mémé Jacqueline had given him and carefully put it in his satchel.

“Thank you for this,” he said as he put it in his bag. “It means a lot to me that you three took the time to make this for me.”

Mémé Jacqueline hugged him again. “You’re welcome.” When she stepped back, she said, “It was a pleasure to get to know you two a little better. You have that competitive glint in your eye that Elizabeth had when playing games.”

Kurt smiled and nodded.

They said their goodbyes to everyone else and headed out.

Before they made it back to Celeste’s place, Sebastian got a text from Victor.
Mémé would like to meet your great aunt and uncle. Please let me know when a good time would be and I’ll be sure to bring her if my mom and dad are at work. We have school break still this coming week. If it can be on a weekend, we could all come, if you want us to.

Sebastian showed Kurt the text, and then responded.

--I’ll talk to them when we get back and let you know. Not quite there yet.

“I feel like I need to pinch myself to prove I’m not dreaming, but I’m afraid that I’m in deep enough to be past that point. If I’m comatose and all of this is a dream, I don’t want to wake up.”

“If you’re dreaming, then they must have you on one hell of a narcotic to induce this detailed of a dream.”

“I know.” Kurt stopped, causing Sebastian to stop abruptly since they were holding hands.

Sebastian turned and looked at him. Kurt stepped forward and kissed him. Sebastian was surprised, but went with it. He wrapped his other hand around Kurt’s back and pulled him closer.

“As much as I enjoy a romantic kiss on the sidewalk, just a few blocks from here we have a nice warm bed we can get into after we shower, where we can kiss all we want without being so cold.”

“Sounds perfect.”

After spending quite a while enjoying kissing without being cold, Kurt turned over and Sebastian held him close. He kissed the back of Kurt’s neck. He ran his hand along Kurt’s arm and then down his hip and onto his upper thigh. “You are so sexy. You drive me crazy. And not only are you super sexy, you’re kind and loving and smart and talented. You haven’t told a single person that you got one of the leads in the spring musical or that you had one of the leads in the fall play.”

“It hasn’t really come up.”

“Well, I think I might just brag to everyone tomorrow about how my fiancé is super awesomely talented.”

Kurt laughed. “If you do, I may feel the need to brag about how MY fiancé wrote an amazing senior thesis paper and got top marks.”

“Hmm. Maybe I’ll just tell them what an amazing kisser you are.”

“Is that so?”

He kissed along Kurt’s shoulder.

“I know what you’re doing.”

“And what’s that?”

“Scoot back.” Kurt waited and then turned over and got up on his hands and knees and pinned Sebastian to the bed. “I threatened to tickle you with my beard and didn’t follow through. And you’re intentionally saying things to get me to tickle you.”

“Who me?”
“Yes, you.”

Sebastian looked away and feigned innocence. “Could be.”

“You’re so much fun. I love you.” Kurt kissed down his neck and slipped his shirt up a bit and did what he had threatened to do.

“That is oddly comforting in a totally ticklish way. It’s also a big turn on, so if you want to save it for another time...”

“Was there something else you wanted to talk about?” Kurt sat back up on his knees, straddling Sebastian.

“I just want to make sure you’re actually okay with everyone coming over here tomorrow and everything.”

“I really am. It’s still a weird feeling knowing that I had, well, have family members here, but I’d like them to meet your family, who has been nothing but welcoming and amazing to me. I just hope everyone gets along. I think they will. Georges and Noelle coming over and meeting Clara and Victor ahead of time is nice of them. And I hope we all have fun. Anything else?”

“I can’t think of anything else, other than wanting you so badly to go back to what you were doing – and this time don’t stop. I promise to be very quiet. I want you so bad. I love you.”

Kurt leaned down and kissed him. “I love you too. You never need to beg, mon abri. Let me get what we need.”

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