### Time`em

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**Time`em**

by elle_delajoie

**Summary**

S2+ AU. Sharing secrets.
What happens when Sam allows Kurt to share his family’s financial problems with Burt?
What other secret does Sam share with Kurt that day he delivers pizzas to Dalton? What happens when Karofsky tells Kurt that Santana is blackmailing him and allows Kurt to tell Burt the truth?

Story starts in February. Events of the fall and winter are a little more condensed at McKinley. See part 2 of this series for details. Kurt and Karofsky's and the Dalton timelines remain the same.
(In this AU, Shelby Corcoran did not adopt Beth.)
Updates on Mondays.
About 15 minutes into their session, Kurt heard his name and paid attention.

“Kurt, you seem preoccupied today.” Mr. Adams said.

“Sorry. I was just going through what I need to get done this afternoon and evening. I’m trying to get ahead so that I can stay in Lima all weekend with no schoolwork hanging over my head.”

“I see. What’s going on in Lima?”

“My old school is in the championship football game, which makes no sense to me since football should have been over months ago. But I quit trying to make sense of things when it comes to McKinley. So, Blaine and I are headed to Lima when school gets out on Friday since he was the one that came up with an idea that helped keep my friends on the team from having to forfeit the game.”

“And you’re both staying the whole weekend?”

“No, just me. He’s going to head back after the game. He’s going to spend the weekend at Wes’ place in Columbus. I’ll get up early Saturday and work the whole day more than likely. I need the money. And Dad likes to show up and fiddle around and keep me company.”

“Did you like any of the clubs you’ve been considering?”

“I didn’t go to any of the meetings.”

“You’re going to have to put more effort into this, Kurt. The requirements were that you would join at least two extracurricular activities. The Warblers count, but I’ve been very lenient. We’ve been back to school for nearly four weeks. You need to find something else to join.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I’m going to let you leave early this week to get started on your schoolwork.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Kurt headed off to Lima as soon as his last class ended since he had to work at the shop for a few hours before the game. Blaine wasn’t planning to leave for Lima until around 5:30.

After he finished his shift at the shop, Kurt headed home and changed quickly. Burt, Carole, and Kurt met up with Blaine at the school and headed up into the stands to find a seat. The first half of the game went horribly, but the girls did manage to keep the game going. At halftime, the rest of the guys on the football team gave in and headed out to the field to perform with the New Directions. The halftime show was spectacular. The rest of the team rejoined the New Directions footballers and played in the second half. With the team back together, they were able to pull off a win.

Kurt headed home with his parents while Finn and the rest of the New Directions headed to Brittany’s house for a celebration party. Carole encouraged him to go with Finn, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it. He hadn’t played any part in their victory, so he didn’t feel like it was his place to join in the celebration. As planned, Blaine headed to Wes’ house.
“You can call me a hopeless romantic, but it’s my favorite holiday,” Blaine said as he and Kurt stood in line at the Lima Bean in Marysville.

“Really?”

“I think there’s something really great about a day where you’re encouraged to just lay it all on the line and say to somebody, ‘I’m in love with you.’”

Kurt just looked at him somewhat incredulously, but continued to listen as they stepped closer to the counter as the line moved forward.

“This year I want to do something really radical and I need your opinion on this. There’s this guy that I sort of like. And I’ve only known him for a little while, but I wanna tell him that I think my feelings are starting to change into something – deeper. So I have to ask… Do you think it’s too much to sing to someone on Valentine’s Day?”

“Not at all.” Kurt’s heart swelled with the potential that Blaine was going to “lay it all on the line” for him and serenade him.

“What can I get you?” the barista asked as Blaine and Kurt reached the counter.

“A medium drip and a grande non-fat mocha for this guy. And maybe I could get him to split one of those cupid cookies with me.”

“You know my coffee order?” came stammering out somewhat breathless, when what he was really thinking about was the cupid cookie. Not a snickerdoodle or a white chocolate chip macadamia cookie. He wants to share a CUPID cookie with me. Blaine loved Valentine’s Day and one amazing serenade was coming his way. He was certain of it.

“Of course, I do.”

Of course, he does.

“I think he’s finally going to ask me to be his boyfriend officially.”

“What makes you think that?” Mr. Adams asked.

Kurt recounted their visit to the Lima Bean the day before and continued. “We’ve been on over 30 coffee dates now. You know we do out homework together, even though we aren’t in the same classes, except Algebra 2 and Chemistry, so it’s not just so he can help me or mentor me more because I don’t need any help. We’ve had umpteen movie dates in his room.”

“Well, I hope things work out for you the way you want them to. You just mentioned coursework. You’re not struggling with that this semester?”

“No, not at all. After the semester break, I started out on equal footing, so keeping up isn’t a problem. Of course, the classes here are more demanding, but I like that. That’s one of my favorite parts about being here. The teachers actually teach. We’ve talked about that before.”

“We have. Have you started looking at colleges or universities yet?”

“No. Should I be?” Kurt felt panicked all of a sudden.
“Well, the college and career planning seminar for juniors starts in,” Mr. Adams paused and checked his calendar. “Three weeks. So, technically, you don’t have to be thinking about it yet, but soon.”

“But it’s so far from now.”

“Not as far as you think. Schools with early admission have application deadlines in October or November. Regular application deadlines are in December and early January.”

“That’s still a long time.”

“There’s a lot to plan for, especially for students like you, Kurt.”

“What do you mean?” The panic was building.

“High-achieving students, especially ones with parents with a lot of assets, but very little in the way of liquid assets, have to do a lot of searching to find financial aid. Since your dad and stepmother got married, their incomes will be combined and your dad’s business will figure into his assets even though he can’t sell it to help pay for you to go to college. The machinery in his shop is worth a lot of money, plus the building and the land it sits on.”

“Oh.” Crap. He had never even thought about how people paid to go to college. He didn’t actually know anyone personally who had gone to college. Well, Carole, but she never talked about it. Focus on Mr. Adams, he reminded himself.

“So, it’s very, very unlikely that you will be eligible for any federal or state grants or income-based financial aid. You’ll be offered loans, but you’ve mentioned wanting to study in New York. Schools like NYU cost over $50,000 a year, just for tuition. That’s a lot of borrowing. The only other option is scholarships.”

“So, $200,000 plus the cost of living in New York City for four years at NYU?” Oh, my God. There’s no way.

Mr. Adams nodded.

He tried to temper his response to a more suitable level. “I see what you mean. I do need to get started on that. Will the seminar teach me what I need to know or is there a book or something I should read?”

“The seminar is quite well-organized. You shouldn’t need anything extra, except the time you put in doing the research once the seminar starts.”

“Okay.” I hope he’s right.

“How are things going with you working harder to get to know people? Have you spent time with anyone besides Blaine in this past week? He’s the only person you’ve mentioned today.”

“Not really. He wants to go out to coffee after Warblers rehearsal most days. By the time we get back, I have homework to do. I did join the Yoga Club. It meets before classes on Tuesday mornings.”

Mr. Adams laughed. “Alright, Kurt. You win for now. I’m pretty certain that you knew that you were supposed to join a club that helps you integrate into the student body here at Dalton. Joining a club where no one speaks to each other is following the letter of the law, but not the spirit of it.”

Kurt nodded in agreement with Mr. Adam’s assessment of his club choice. “I’m just not like the
other students here. I’ve assimilated well enough I think. I don’t stand out. I’m not the ‘late in the semester transfer kid’ or a weirdo. I’m just Kurt who’s been here long enough to know how to be a proper Dalton boy. Before winter break, I gave up trying to come up with ways to be unique with my uniform while following the ‘letter of the law’, as you put it.”

“You’re still finding it unpleasant.”

“Not ‘unpleasant’ per se. I love the academic environment. I love the peace and quiet. And most of all, I love that I’m not being given new bruises daily and I don’t live in fear. But I’m not a Dalton boy at heart. It’s not that I haven’t tried. I have. I’m trying to follow your advice. I observed. I listened. I paid very close attention – like studying for an acting role. The guys here have been learning this role since birth, I think. The whole mentality of becoming what your family expects you to become is so far removed from my reality. It’s unnerving to talk to them. Talking to a lot of them is like listening to someone saying lines from a play they memorized so long ago that they don’t even realize that the words aren’t their own. The words they say come out their mouths with such ease, but they seem so disconnected with what they’re saying. And if I dare veer from the script, they just shut down or change the topic.”

“That’s a really interesting assessment.”

“Maybe the teachers should assign students to take the opposite stance on a topic. Like have everyone turn in a proposed topic for an opinion or persuasive essay for English. Once the topics and side of the issue has been chosen, flip their choices on them and make them write the essay from the opposing opinion. Teach them how to research, not just find and use the first three articles that agree with their indoctrination.”

“Interesting idea.”

“I think so.”

“Well, our 30 minutes are up.” Mr. Adams smiled. “Talking to you is always an interesting addition to my week, Kurt.”

“Thanks, I think.” Kurt stood up and walked to the door.

“I’ll mark that you met the second club requirement. Keep trying to find at least one more person you can spend time with.”

He nodded and left. Find a human among the collective. Easier said than done. The number of Borg jokes Sam could make is endless here. Kurt headed up to his room to get working on his pile of reading.

Kurt had finished lunch quickly and was sitting in an armchair in one of the halls waiting for the first period after lunch to start. He pulled a notebook out and drew a heart with an arrow through it and wrote his name and Blaine’s inside it using a red pen. It’s just a matter of time now. Valentine’s Day is in three days.

Blaine approached smiling, obviously glad to have found Kurt after searching for him. “Whatcha’ doin’?”


“Well, come on. You’re gonna wanna see this. I’ve called an emergency meeting of the Warblers
“Oh. Sounds serious.” Kurt grabbed his satchel, stood, and quickly followed Blaine to the Warblers’ rehearsal room. His anticipation peaked. Now. Finally.

Blaine put his hands on Kurt’s shoulders, guiding him to the room enthusiastically. “Let’s hope not. I just need to ask them a tiny little favor.”

They made their way to the room. Kurt took a seat on a couch near the council table. He was bristling with excitement.

“This emergency meeting is called to order.” Wes banged his gavel. “Junior member Blaine Anderson, the floor is yours.”

Blaine stood from the chair he had been sitting in at the front of the room. “Esteemed Council, I’ll be brief. Simply put – I’m in love.”

Kurt’s face flashed with a sweet, yet shy smile and excitement. He’s in love… with me… and he just told everyone.

“Congrats,” David said.

“I’m not really good at talking about my feelings. I’m much better at singing them.” He made eye contact with a barely-managing-to-stay-seated Kurt. “But still I could use a little help, which is why I’m asking to enlist the Warblers to help serenade this individual in song – off campus.”

The room broke out with everyone vocally questioning his suggestion. The council explained why his idea was preposterous, but Blaine persevered.

“We’re becoming privileged porcelain birds.”

The room broke out in unrest again. Wes reestablished order with his gavel.

Kurt raised his hand and asked to speak. He backed Blaine’s idea. Off campus is as good a place as any to sing…to me. He could barely contain his excitement.

After Kurt’s passionate speech about how singing in informal settings could help improve the Warblers’ performances at competitions, Wes asked, “And where would this performance take place?”

“At the GAP at the North Hills Mall. I’d like to call it ‘The Warblers GAP Attack.’”

A lot of the Warblers laughed at his name for the event.

Kurt asked, “Why the GAP?”

“The guy I like is the junior manager.”

Kurt’s face fell. A vote was taken. He was too shocked to move. The junior manager at the GAP?

Kurt felt like a knife had been plunged through his heart.

The motion passed and arrangements were made to hold a rehearsal after school.

Kurt left the room in a daze and struggled to focus the rest of the afternoon.

“The guy I like is the junior manager.” “The guy I like is the junior manager.” “The guy I like is the
junior manager."

After his last period class, he went to his room and headed home as planned, not even bothering to take the time to change. He had to work a few hours in the shop, participate in Friday family night dinner, and then he had plans to spend the night at Rachel’s house with Mercedes later that evening.

Focus. You have to make it to Lima in one piece. Focus. The guy he likes is the junior manager. Wrong focus. Focus on the road. He turned the music up and sang along.

Over pizza late that evening, he told Mercedes and Rachel what had happened earlier in the day and he realized that he had made it all up in his head. Every bit of what he thought was casually dating Blaine was just Blaine being Blaine. The fact that he knew his coffee order and split cupid cookies with him had nothing to do with having any romantic feelings for him whatsoever.

He hadn’t planned on attending the GAP Attack since he hadn’t stayed for the song rehearsal. He didn’t even know what song they were singing. Rachel and Mercedes encouraged him to participate. He fell asleep not having made a decision.

The next morning, he got up and headed back to the shop to put in a half-day’s work before heading back home. He left himself just enough time to shower, put his uniform back on, and head to the North Hills Mall. He had gotten a group text reminder of the time and location to meet, so he headed straight to the meet-up point outside the GAP when he got to the mall.

He didn’t have the nerve to ask what song was being sung because he didn’t want to answer why he hadn’t been at the rehearsal the afternoon before. They went inside the store.

“That’s him – the blonde one folding sweaters.” Blaine pointed out to him.

“I can see the appeal. That’s quite a head of hair he has.” Seriously, Blaine? He’s like 20.

“His name is Jeremiah. If he and I got married, the GAP would give me a 50% discount.”

Blaine was facing away from Kurt still, which blocked his ability to see Kurt roll his eyes at that statement. The most important information you can share with me about him is that you’d get a 50% discount at the GAP? Ugh.

“This is insane. I don’t know what I’m doing. We haven’t even really gone out on a date. We shouldn’t do this.”

Kurt grabbed him by the shoulders and told him to man up – something he regretted when he heard the song start. Before they had gotten halfway through the song, Kurt had pretty much stopped singing and was just hanging out by one of the displays. He had expected a typical Warblers performance where everyone would stay together and shuffle step with singing. He did not expect Blaine to follow Jeremiah around the store and sing standing one foot in front of him. This isn’t a serenade – it’s musical stalking or something.

Afterwards, he and Blaine were sitting on a bench outside the mall.

Blaine asked him, “Was it too much?”

Kurt’s response was a “You have got to be kidding me” look. Um, yeah. Too much in so many ways.
“It was too much.”

Just then Jeremiah came out. He told them that Blaine had outed him and that he had been fired. He also pointed out that their age difference made a relationship between them impossible. He walked away.

“Can I ride back to the school with you?”

“Sure.” *That’s what people who have been friend zoned do, right? Be there for their friends when they publicly humiliate themselves.*

Blaine caught Kurt at breakfast and sat down with him and invited him out for coffee. Kurt agreed to go. He worked on homework until lunch and thought about what he was going to say to Blaine.

The ride to the coffee shop was awkward. Kurt reached for the radio and turned it up and they sang along. They got in line once they were inside.

“Ugh. Don’t they have anything here that isn’t covered with stupid little hearts? Gross.”

“Well, you’ve certainly changed your tune.” Kurt responded dryly. *Talk about a total 180.*

“I don’t think I’ve ever made that big a fool of myself, which is really saying something because I’ve performed at theme parks.” He sighed. “I just can’t believe that I made it all up in my head.”

*You and me both.* Kurt gathered his courage. “Okay.” He tamped down his inner bitch. “Can I ask you something? Because we’ve always been completely honest with each other.” Kurt looked Blaine directly in the eyes. “You and I, we hang out. We sing flirty duets together. You know my coffee order. Was I supposed to think that that was nothing?”

Blaine was completely clueless. “What do you mean?”

“I thought the guy you wanted to ask out for Valentine’s Day was me.” *Duh.*

Blaine blinked considering what Kurt had said. “Wow. I really am clueless.” He paused. “Look, Kurt. I don’t know what I’m doing. I pretend like I do. And I know how to act it out in song, the truth is, I’ve never really been anyone’s boyfriend.”

Kurt smiled gently. “Me neither.” He managed to tame the rant that wanted to escape and actually listened.

“Let me be really clear about something. I really, really care about you, but as you and about 20 mortified shoppers saw, I’m not very good at romance. I don’t want to screw this up.”

Kurt nodded slightly. “So, it’s just like *When Harry Met Sally* – but I get to play Meg Ryan.” He looked directly into Blaine’s eyes with a flirty expression on his face.

“Deal. Don’t they get together in the end?”

*Of course. It’s a rom-com. But clearly, my life isn’t a rom-com. It’s time to move you to the friend zone and file this whole thing into the lessons I learned about dating. Unless both parties agree that dates are actual DATES, then two people are not dating. Got it.*
They had made it to the front of the line. Kurt ordered. “Can I get non-fat mocha, and a medium drip for my friend here, Billy Crystal?”

“You know my coffee order.”

Kurt had a flash of inspiration. “You know what? I think I’ve got something for us to do on Valentine’s Day.”

“Do tell.”

“I’ll have to make a few phone calls first. Give me a few minutes and I’ll find you.” Kurt stepped outside. When he came back in and sat down with Blaine, he explained his idea.

Blaine called another emergency Warblers rehearsal for 2:00. They headed back to the school. Kurt proposed his idea for a Lonely Hearts Café. They practiced a 20-minute set of songs. No choreography and limited harmony, but they still sounded good.

After school, the Warblers headed to Breadstix instead of holding rehearsal. Performing was fun to do as a group, and since they did it early, it left time for those in the group with girlfriends to keep their plans. It wasn’t their most spectacular performance, but everyone had a good time.

Kurt’s heart still ached, but what was done, was done. Time to move on. The six other people singing in his Navigator made to too hard for him to wallow on the drive back to Dalton.

Kurt’s counseling session was pretty much a repeat of the previous ones. Mr. Adams admonished to make new friends. He did his best to deflect and talk about other things.

At dinner, he sat next to Blaine. Operation Friend Zone. Time to man up and invite my only friend here to be my plus one at Rachel’s party. My PLATONIC plus one.

“Are you busy Friday?”

“No, why?”

“Rachel’s having a party. Do you want to go with me?”

“Are you sure she’s okay with it?”

“Of course. Your idea helped keep the football team from forfeiting. Everyone will be fine with you coming. No one considers you to be the ‘enemy’ or anything. We just won’t talk about our set lists and everything will be fine.”

“Well, then, sure.”

Rachel’s words were on repeat as he curled up in his oversized chair to attempt to sleep – “Blaine Warbler, I’m gonna rock your world.” as the image of the two of them French kissing right in front of him played over and over in his mind.

So, I’m not as over it as I thought. But now I’m 100% sure there will never be anything between us. Maybe I need to push him out of the friend zone and into the fellow Warbler category.
After the unfortunate encounter with Burt finding Blaine in his bed, Kurt managed to get Blaine up and goad him enough to get him to drink the coffee and eat the breakfast he had made for him. He sent him back to Dalton, claiming that his privileges for having company over had been revoked due to the drinking. Blaine left and drove back to Dalton.

After Burt’s lecture about Kurt’s inappropriate behavior, Kurt just needed a break. He had planned on spending the afternoon working at the shop after Blaine headed back to Dalton, so he didn’t bring home any schoolbooks or his laptop. He grabbed his coat and took off and left for the shop early to put some extra hours in since he had nothing better to do.

He spent the majority of the day working on a few cars, doing inventory, updating the books, and anything else that he could think of in an attempt to keep his mind off the whole situation.

Burt showed up several hours later and puttered around a bit. The two of them didn’t talk about what had happened. Once everything that could be done had been done, they headed back to the house. Kurt picked his stuff up and drove back to Dalton so that he could actually get his schoolwork done. He did even more thinking on the 90-minute drive back. He listened to Mellencamp for a while feeling nostalgic and wishing he had just taken his books home with him so he could have stayed longer. The longer he went without having to see Blaine, the better.

Monday morning, Kurt was sitting alone eating breakfast. Blaine plopped his tray right down next to him and began to talk as if nothing had happened over the weekend. Kurt participated in the conversation as little as possible. Blaine reminded him of their coffee date after school. Kurt just went with it, not knowing how to get out of it at that point without lying.

“You can’t lead her on.”

“What says I’m leading her on?”

*Me. That’s who. The guy you took out on so many coffee dates. The guy you sang flirty duets with. The guy who thought those things meant something.*

By the end of the day, he really wished he had not gone. Blaine had walked out of the Lima Bean and left him there after their argument.

Kurt called Trent because he couldn’t think of anyone else who might willingly make the 35-minute drive to pick him up at the Lima Bean in Marysville. He found out Trent’s coffee order and placed it to time it right for his arrival. He was standing outside waiting for Trent and hopped in his car. He handed him the coffee when he got in. He also handed him a paper sack with one of the Lima Bean’s signature chocolate chip cookies in it. Trent was very gracious about the whole situation, which Kurt was thankful for.

That evening, he spoke to Rachel on the phone. She waxed poetic about how lovely their date had
been. Kurt tried to warn her. Despite how hurt he was that she went out with Blaine when she knew that Kurt had feelings for him. He tried to be a decent human being. Not that it worked. *I tried.*

Tuesday morning, their breakfast roles were reversed. Kurt plopped down next to Blaine, with a cup of coffee in his hand. Blaine stopped eating when Kurt sat down.

“Please listen and don’t talk. I only have one thing to say right now. I apologize for the statement I made about bisexual teen guys. I was just angry and it didn’t even come out like I meant for it to.” He took a deep breath and started again. “Bisexuals who date in a male/female pairing are not outcasts like homosexual couples. I was upset because if you are bisexual, I will be alone again. I will be the only gay guy I know. It was a knee-jerk, selfish response.” He paused again. “If you’re bisexual, that’s fine. I’m already friends with at least one bisexual person, possibly two. I’m not someone who believes bisexuality doesn’t exist. I will be more careful with what I say in the future.” He stood and walked toward the classroom wing, tossing his cup on the way out.

Kurt struggled with paying attention in class. *Why did I agree to meet Rachel after school today? To be supportive. Blaine’s going to shoot her down, just like he shot me down.*

He headed out to meet her at the Lima Bean in Marysville as soon as the Warblers let out. He managed to beat Blaine there by a few minutes and Rachel was already there waiting for them both.

Fifteen minutes later, he was in the Navigator heading back toward Westerville, his mind reeling. *Who cares about you buddy?* on repeat in his thoughts.

At that point, he had to admit to himself that his inner bitch wasn’t on lock down anymore. He was angry and hurt. *Who cares about me?* Obviously that was a question that didn’t have the answer “Rachel Berry” and maybe not even “Blaine Anderson”.

The only response that came to mind was that his dad cared about him and Carole too. He fought back the tears to make the 35-minute drive. Once he was in his room, he let them out.

“How are things going?”

“I went to Yoga Club. I’m keeping up in my classes. The Warblers are rehearsing for Regionals. We’re going to sing for the Crawford County Day Glee Club later this afternoon before dinner.”

“That could be fun.”

“I’m not in the mood, but we’ll see, I guess.”

“Why aren’t you in the mood? I’ve always gotten the impression that you love to perform.”

“Ah, well, something happened that I can’t talk about because I don’t want to incriminate other people, but needless to say, Blaine and I aren’t really speaking right now. And the song we’re singing is supposed to be somewhat flirtatious between the two of us, which will be hard to pull off today.”
“I see.”

“I also have school work to do and with Warblers rehearsal, coming here to talk to you, driving over to sing for them, and coming back for a late dinner, I’m going to get a late start on my work for the evening.”

“Have you come up with any ideas on making new friends?”

“Not really.”

“If you’re not going to spend time with Blaine anymore, you really need to find someone else to befriend.”

“Trent. I’ll work on talking to Trent. He was nice enough to do me a big favor a couple of days ago.”

“Alright.”

The session ended early because Kurt was only giving short answers to direct questions and Mr. Adams finally gave up and let him leave.

Kurt headed out to the parking lot to drive over to Crawford County Day.

“Oh, hey Kurt.” Blaine said. “How about I just jump in with you instead of driving?”

“That’s fine.” Obviously, Blaine was too oblivious to be unaware of how his actions affected others, but also completely oblivious to when people were aggravated with him. A thought flashed into his head. \textit{Blaine is the male version of Rachel, except that he’s so dapper and charming, that people just give him a pass like Finn gets for being such a golden retriever. Blaine – the dapper, oblivious, prep school boy.}

Blaine got in and they drove the 10 minutes to get to the girls’ school. It was on the same property as Dalton, but on the opposite side. The athletic fields for each school, plus a large wooded area separated the school buildings themselves.

They performed but Kurt just wasn’t into it. He didn’t think that sexy was what they needed to win, but Blaine didn’t listen when he suggested that adding real choreography to the songs would help them win.

After they got back to Dalton, Blaine followed him to his room and asked if he could come in. Kurt let him in. Blaine attempted to teach Kurt to make sexier faces. The whole thing was ridiculous and Kurt got aggravated and eventually asked Blaine to just leave. He knew he had done a bad job and no amount of looking in a mirror and practicing faces was going to change that.

He also knew that he would have to come up with legitimate ways to avoid spending time with Blaine. He didn’t have it in him to play the dutiful friend anymore. \textit{I’m done.}

Blaine faked being sick and left his last period class 20 minutes early and headed to Lima. He managed to time his arrival to Burt’s shop so he would be gone a few minutes before Kurt arrived.
He went in to talk to Burt about how Kurt needed “The Talk”. Burt wasn’t incredibly receptive, but he listened. Blaine headed from the shop over to Rachel’s to meet her for their platonic date.

Kurt arrived about 10 minutes after Blaine had left. Burt didn’t say anything about Blaine’s visit. The two of them worked together on some more complicated repairs that needed done and went home after closing up the shop.

Kurt woke up quite early and ate breakfast on his own. He wasn’t sure where his dad was, but he knew Carole was working and he was certain that Finn was still asleep. After he finished, he headed back upstairs and got dressed for the day. A little later, he got a text from his dad asking him to come down to the kitchen.

He headed downstairs to find Burt waiting to give him “The Talk”. Kurt covered his ears and didn’t want to hear what his dad had to say. When he finally listened, he realized that Burt had pamphlets in his hand.

Kurt was pleased when he realized that Burt wasn’t going to go over the information in the pamphlets, and that he just wanted to talk to him. He gave him an uplifting talk about valuing himself. He walked upstairs reciting the words “You matter.” that his dad had shared with him.

He sat down on his bed and looked through the pamphlets. They really didn’t have any information in them that he wasn’t already aware of, although he did appreciate the drawings and the specific information without the whole thing feeling like he was reading a porn magazine. He was most happy about the fact that his dad had taken the time to read the pamphlets and would no longer be able to say that he didn’t know what “went down in the tent”. He put the pamphlets in an envelope and put them at the bottom of his sweater drawer after he finished reading them.

He put his shoes on and headed to the shop to put in his Saturday hours. He listened to music on the short drive and turned the radio in the work bays while he worked. Kurt stayed at the shop through lunch working on a repair that turned out to be a little more time-consuming than he had anticipated.

When he got back home, he went into the kitchen to find a snack, only to hear voices coming from the family room downstairs. He went down and found several of the New Directions guys and Tina were sitting around watching a movie. No one said anything. He just sat on the floor and joined them.

About an hour later, Finn went up and came back down with a stack of pizza boxes. He grabbed a couple of slices to eat and while the movie was paused, he heard all about Rachel’s second date with Blaine the night before from Tina. He wanted to just get up and leave, but he finished watching the movie before he headed back to Dalton.

Kurt spent the day in the Dalton library working on a big paper he had to write for US History. He forcefully pushed all thoughts of Rachel and Blaine from his mind until after he had finished his final draft. He put all of the books he had used back on the cart to be reshelved and headed back to his room.

He decided that he wouldn’t open the door if anyone knocked that afternoon or evening. He didn’t turn any music on like he normally did when he was in his room. He put his earbuds in and lay back in his bed to think.
Blaine. Over. Done. Perhaps they could be friends in the future. They did have a lot of common interests and got along easily. But his flirty nature was too confusing for Kurt to let him close again any time soon.

Rachel. Over. Done. Permanently. He couldn’t let her close again. She wanted a “best gay” or “platonic life partner” or whatever – Blaine could have the role. I don’t want it.

He pushed himself to see the two of them as objectively as possible and what he came up with was how perfect they were for each other. They could absolutely push to keep themselves in the spotlight without pushing the other out. They could compliment each other in the spotlight, whereas from their viewpoint, he was in competition with both of them. Not anymore.

Now, he just needed to figure out how to befriend Trent to keep Mr. Adams from hassling him so much. Or find someone else.

Kurt took a deep breath and approached the table where Trent was sitting alone at breakfast.

“Mind if I join you?”

“Please.”

“I wanted to thank you again for picking me up last Monday. I really appreciate it.”

“Oh, you’re welcome. It wasn’t a big deal. Can I ask you something?”

“Sure.”

“Why don’t you ever come to any of the Warblers’ movie nights?”

“What movie nights?”

“We alternate between going out to the theater and watching movies in the Warblers’ practice room on Friday evenings.”

“Well, for one, I didn’t know about them. But even if I had known, I could have only come those couple of weekends in mid-January when we got snowed in here at school. I go home to Lima every Friday afternoon as soon as the last bell rings. I work in my dad’s shop and then we have our family dinner on Friday nights. I don’t miss unless I absolutely can’t get there.”

“I see. Are you here on Saturday evenings?”

“Sometimes, but sometimes not. Some of the time I don’t come back until Sunday from Lima.”

“What kind of shop does your dad own?”

“It’s called Hummel Tires and Lube, but we do more than that now. He just never changed the name. It’s a full service auto repair shop. I’m a mechanic. I work there three hours on Fridays and anywhere from 4-8 hours on Saturdays.”

“Wow. That’s pretty cool. I don’t know how to fix anything. I can’t even change a tire.”

“I could teach you some time.”

“Maybe.”
“What are your hobbies?”
“I play clarinet.”
“Do you play in the orchestra?”
“I do. I’m first chair.”
“Wow. Congratulations.”
“I’d like to be a conductor someday. It’s a current debate in my family. I’m just a sophomore, so I have some time still.”
“What are you supposed to be?”
“A doctor.”
“Oh.”
“Does your dad want you to take over his shop?”
“He’d probably like me to, but that job will more than likely fall to my stepbrother who enjoys small-town life. I’m hoping to end up in New York City or someplace equally open to me being a stage performer.”
“And your dad’s not upset?”
“He’s probably sad about it, but it’s not a surprise. He’s known I was gay since I was three and he’s known that small-town life is not the place for an admittedly flaming gay male to live a comfortable life.”
“Flaming?”
“Well, I’ve been told repeatedly since coming here that my job is to assimilate and become a proper Dalton boy. I’ve done my best. Even the regular clothes I’ve brought with me to wear back and forth to Lima are the most boring clothes that I own. I am far, far from the typical Dalton student.”
“I see.”
“I doubt it.”
“Show me.”
“Okay, but don’t say that you weren’t warned. And keep in mind that gossiping about people is a type of quiet bullying. I am opening up to you and showing you something private and trusting you to keep it between us.”
“Alright.”
Kurt pulled his phone out and scrolled through photos for a few minutes. He turned the phone so that Trent could see him in the outfit he had worn the day Mr. Schue had sent him to the principal’s office for insubordination about singing Brittany Spears’ songs.
Trent looked at the photo. He had a blank look on his face at first, and then became quite pensive. “You wore that to school?”
“I did.”

“It looks like one of those outfits that runway models wear in Europe, but I’ve never seen any guys actually wear any of those clothes.”

“Well, now you have.”

“I guess so – at least a photo of someone I know wearing them. I’m assuming that there are more. You don’t just have one runway outfit.”

“Oh, no. There are lots more. A whole closet full of more.”

“Interesting.”

“What’s that mean?”

“Well, I’ve wondered why you gave up after you tried to get us to do things a little differently when you came. You said someone told you that you needed to assimilate. That’s what’s behind your flat affect I’m guessing.”

“Pretty much. I’ll show you something else, if you promise to keep it a secret.”

“I promise.”

Kurt pulled up a photo of him and the six New Directions girls in their Lady Gaga outfits from “Bad Romance”. He turned the phone back so Trent could see. “That’s me with the girls during Lady Gaga week. We performed ‘Bad Romance’ in those costumes, which we wore to school.”

“You wore that dress, those leggings, and those heels to school?”

“Yes.”

“Do you have a video?”

“I do, but you have to use headphones.”

Trent pulled his headphones out of his satchel while Kurt logged into the private New Directions MySpace page. Once he had it ready, he plugged Trent’s headphones in and pressed play. Trent’s eyes went wide when he saw Kurt strutting around and dancing in those heels. Then, he realized that Kurt was singing lead with two of the girls. Once it finished, he unplugged his headphones and put them away.

“That was really good. You have a more varied style of singing than I realized.”

“Thank you?”

“Well, the only thing I’ve heard you sing by yourself is ‘Don’t Cry for me Argentina’. Lady Gaga didn’t come to mind as something you’d sing.”

Kurt laughed. “I’ve sung lots of different styles of music. I have over a three octave range.”

“What?”

“One last video before we have to leave.”

Trent pulled his headphones back out. Kurt pulled up “Give Up the Funk”. Trent’s jaw dropped
when he heard Kurt singing the opening of the song. By the end, Trent looked sort of dazed. He pulled his headphones back out.

“How long did you all rehearse that piece?”

“Maybe 30 minutes.”

“What?”

“I tried to tell everyone. I was told my ideas weren’t needed, so I quit attempting to share them.”

The warning bell for first period sounded.

“Meet me for lunch?”

“Sure. But what I showed you isn’t for you to spread around.”

“I know. I already told you I wouldn’t say anything.”

“I’ll find you at lunch.”

“Good afternoon, Kurt.”

“Afternoon”

“Anything in particular on your mind today?”

“Blaine is out of the picture.” Kurt explained how he had misconstrued everything surrounding Blaine and his non-interest in Kurt as vaguely as possible, while conveying his decision to stay away from Blaine, at least for the time being.

“So, you’re plan is to shut him out and walk away?”

“I know it’s immature, but so was stomping off and leaving me stranded in Marysville. This is the most mature choice I can make at the moment. I’m not an awful person. I’m not interested in retaliation. I’m over him, but I need a break from one-on-one time with him. Walking away and saying nothing may be immature, but at least it’s not vengeful.”

“I get that.”

“On the upside, I’ve eaten breakfast and lunch with Trent the last three days. But I still need to come up with a better plan to integrate myself into the student body.”

“Okay. Why the sudden change of heart?”

“I need to be too busy to spend time with Blaine after Warblers rehearsal. So, something directly after classes end would be perfect.”

“So, you want something to fill the large chunk of time you’ve been spending with Blaine?”

“Exactly.”

“Well, how about tutoring? You’re the top in your French class. You could join the tutoring team. It’s a paid position, plus it would look good on your CV for college applications. You set the tutoring
session times.”

“Really? That sounds perfect. That way, I’d have a real reason to not be able to go out to coffee every day. Plus, I need the money.”

Mr. Adams opened a drawer in his desk that had hanging files and searched for the right folder. He pulled out a piece of paper and handed it to Kurt. “Well, fill this form out later and turn it in to Miss Burns out front and she’ll set you up with a time to take a test to determine what level of French you can tutor. Is there anything else on your mind?”

“Money in general. I overheard my dad talking to my stepmother about the cost of keeping me here when I was at home over the weekend. I feel terrible to be such a burden to them.”

“Isn’t your school district paying for your placement here? Your lack of safety in your prior school is what caused you to have to enroll here.”

“My school district?”

“I’m going to set up an appointment for you to speak with an advocate, if that’s okay with you.”

“Sure, but what’s an advocate in this particular instance?”

“Someone who is going to help your family get your school district to pay for you to attend Dalton. When a student cannot receive a proper education in their home district, it’s that district’s responsibility to pay for the student to receive an education in an appropriate environment.”

“I’m sure McKinley will fight tooth and nail.”

“It won’t matter, Kurt. The law is the law. You just need to get someone to advocate for you who knows the education laws.”

“So, in theory, I could stay here next year as well?”

“If the threat remains, then yes.”

“Well, he’s in the same grade as I am, so unless he leaves, the threat will still be there.”

“As soon as you leave, I’ll set up an appointment with someone to come to the school and review your case and speak to you. I’ll need your dad to sign a form though.”

“Just fax it to his work number. I’ll call him and tell him to sign it and fax it right back.”

“I can do that after our session.”

“Well, honestly, I’d rather you do it right now and make an appointment for the advocate than talk about anything else. If I didn’t have to worry about being pulled out mid-term to go back to McKinley, I’d be a lot less stressed out.”

“That’s fine. Why don’t you go ahead and sit there and fill out the form to join the tutoring team while I fax your dad the form and get an appointment set up?”

Please have a seat in the small room over there, Kurt. The test is already set up for you to take. While you take it, I’ll email a recommendation request to Madame LeFèvre. Once your test has been scored and your level determined, you’ll be able to look through the list of people who have signed
up for tutoring. You may have to contact quite a few of them because some of the students forget to come back and take their name off the list when they no longer need a tutor for whatever reason.”

“Thank you.” Kurt walked into the room, sat at the computer and completed the test. Once he was finished, he let the secretary know.

“Just sit over there and wait a few minutes, Kurt. I have a few things to do, but I’ll get everything ready as soon as I can.”

He took a seat and waited for the Miss Burns to have time to talk to him. She motioned him over and handed him a binder. She put up four fingers. He opened it and took down a list of the names of students in levels 1-3 that were on the page. He figured that he would avoid taking any students that were in his fourth year class to make it easier on himself. He took down the names and phone numbers he needed and handed the binder back to her while she was still on the phone. She nodded and he went up to his room to see if any of the guys still needed a tutor.

After he finished breakfast, Kurt walked to where Blaine was sitting and politely informed Blaine that he would no longer be able to go with him to get coffee after Warblers’ rehearsals because he had taken a position as a French tutor.

His heart was still slightly aching, but the knowledge that he was meeting the advocate after school that afternoon helped him focus on learning. Learning was what was important. He kept reminding himself. And spending time with Trent at breakfast and lunch helped him realize that even as much of a freak as most of the Dalton students would think he is, there were maybe a few, who might find him interesting.

After their impromptu performance of “Misery” for those who were in the hall near the Warbler’s practice room, Blaine wasn’t thrilled with Kurt’s comment about “Blaine and the Pips”, but it was true whether he liked it or not. He was singing lead on all three songs they had been working on. Not even a sham of an audition for other potential soloists or featured singers.

He figured the Warblers were used to have a single lead and just never bothered to really question it like a lot of the Dalton boys didn’t question their future career paths.

He left the practice room and headed up to his room to leave Pavarotti and his schoolbooks there before going to the office to meet with the advocate.

He walked into the room, where his dad and the advocate were already seated, and introduced himself. “Good afternoon. I’m Kurt Hummel.” He offered his hand.

Mrs. Huntington shook his hand. She was middle-aged, average build, with an olive complexion, piercing dark eyes, and long black hair pulled up in a chignon. “It’s nice to meet you, Kurt. I’m Eleanor Huntington.” Though she wasn’t physically intimidating, she had a formidable presence that emanated an air of well-earned self-assuredness.

Kurt sat down across the table from her, next to his dad. “I’ve looked through your files from here and McKinley. Sue Sylvester’s report was quite informative. She was the acting principal at the time of the incident that caused you to withdraw and enroll here.”
“That’s correct,” Kurt responded.

“I see no issues whatsoever with proceeding with your case. The school district will balk of course, but they have no legal foot to stand on. The fact that the school board overturned the expulsion of the student that had issued a death threat will make this pretty easy. I just need both of you to sign this form allowing me and the attorney in our office to pursue this matter on your behalf.”

Burt asked, “So, let me get this straight before I sign. If I sign this, you and a lawyer are going to force McKinley to pay for Kurt to go to school here?”

“That is exactly what we will do.”

Burt picked up the pen, signed his name, passed the form over to Kurt for him to sign, and then he slid the paper back across the table.

“Thank you, gentlemen. I’ll call both of you if we need anything further from the two of you.” Mrs. Huntington put all of the paperwork back into her briefcase and left the room.

“How about the two of us go grab an early dinner somewhere before I head back to Lima?”

“Sounds great, Dad. Go pull the car up and I’ll change as fast as I can. I really don’t want to go out in this uniform.

Burt laughed. “Sure thing, kiddo. Just don’t take all day deciding what to wear.”

Kurt hugged him and practically ran to his room to change. He slipped on a pair of jeans, a sweater, and his coat and quickly headed right back down the stairs to meet Burt out front. He hopped in the passenger seat and shut his door. Burt drove toward the exit as Kurt buckled up.

“Where to?” Burt asked.

“I haven’t been many places here. How about Chinese?”

“Sure thing, kiddo. Just tell me where to turn.”

Kurt gave him directions. “So, if we get McKinley to pay this year’s tuition, would there be any chance you’d be willing to use your refund and add it to whatever I can make this summer so that I could come back to Dalton next school year?”

Burt didn’t answer right away. He found a place to park and opened his door. Kurt followed his lead and got out too. They went in the restaurant, ordered at the counter and took a seat at one of the tables.

“So, you don’t want to come back to McKinley?”

“I don’t know, Dad. I like being safe. I like attending classes with respectful students who learn and teachers who actually teach. I like learning.”

“I know you do, bud. It’s just hard having you away from home. I mean I knew I was going to lose you, but it came too early. I wasn’t ready yet. Maybe I won’t ever be ready. I’ll really think about it. I mean of course the answer is yes, if you want to come back here, we’ll figure out a way to make that happen. I just need to think about this more from your perspective. Things were worse at McKinley than you let on weren’t they?”
“Yes and no. By the time all of the stuff with Karofsky started, the rest had really died down a lot. But yeah, things were bad, especially freshman year before New Directions started up. I’m not going to lie to you and tell you that I love it at Dalton. I don’t. The other students are not all that welcoming of non-conformists. I don’t hold a lot of the same political and societal beliefs that many of them do. They are not allowed to bully me because I disagree, but that doesn’t make them want to be my friends. I’m tutoring people now. I’m working on making some new friends. I’m going to give it my best shot. But no, I don’t feel an overwhelming sense of acceptance at Dalton. But safety and a high quality education are more important than having a lot of friends when, in all honesty, there’s not a high likelihood of remaining friends with people from high school if I move away from Lima.”

Their number was called. Kurt retrieved their food and took it back to the table. He and Burt ate as they continued to talk.

“This week, the juniors started a seminar on college and career preparation. The class will teach us about applying to college, how to find grants and scholarships, and everything we need to know. McKinley doesn’t offer anything like that. The guidance counselor at Dalton is a licensed psychologist. He’s really helpful and easy to talk to. Miss Pillsbury is kind and tries hard, but she’s a little too neurotic to be of any real help. She has 100 pamphlets, which can be useful, but she seems to have no real life experience.”

“You see the school’s psychologist?”

“It was part of my enrollment requirements. When I was admitted late in the term for the death threat, one of my requirements was to attend weekly counseling sessions to help me deal with the trauma and help me cope with everything. The other was that I had to join two extracurricular activities.”

“And you find it helpful?”

“I do. That’s how I found out about the advocate. Mr. Adams told me about how it worked.”

“Alright. I never figured you for the type that would open up to a counselor.”

“It was never a requirement to stay some place safe before. I can’t be completely uncooperative if I want to stay. At first, I balked and didn’t really say much, but eventually I got used to it. He’s nice and he’s a good listener. Sometimes I still balk and don’t say much. Opening up is hard, but I’m trying.”

“Well, I’m glad you have someone who can help you. Do you at least like being in the singing group here?”

“It’s fine. I don’t get a chance to sing solos ever, but the overall dynamic is less adversarial? More regulated? I’m not really sure how to describe it. Wes rules with his gavel. Next year will possibly be more fun with Wes graduating this year. If the new council is less rigid, then it might be more fun.”

“How about that Blaine kid? You and him still friends?”

“Not really, Dad. I’ve eliminated Rachel from my friends list as well. That’s another thing that would make going back to McKinley hard. I thought that she and I had come to an understanding and that our understanding had led us toward friendship. But due to her behavior last week, I’ve realized that the only person Rachel cares about is herself. Now, that Blaine has decided that he is actually gay, don’t be surprised if Rachel turns her romantic gaze back on Finn.”

“What do you mean?”

“Finn broke up with her for a reason – a good one. But Finn broke Sam and Quinn up by cheating
with Quinn. Now, it’s been long enough the battle for Finn will begin anew. Quinn has had him for a few months and that will just make Rachel want him all the more, especially since Blaine decided he was gay. Please consider putting Finn in therapy. Those two girls have made a mess of his mind. Think how many times the two of them have jerked him around. Finn has his faults, but he really deserves a girlfriend that respects him and isn’t just using his social status at school to boost their own egos. Quinn wants to run with Finn for Prom King and Queen. I just know it. I’m not even there and I know it. Get him some help. It’s surprising how helpful it can be to talk to an adult who has no authority to ground you or punish you.”

“I’ll see what I can do. So, no more Blaine?”

“Nope. I need a break from him. Of course, he’s in the Warblers, so I still see him four days a week after school. But no more coffee dates, no more movies together, at least not for a long while. I need time to decide whether I can build a real friendship with him. I’ll be fine. I’m not in love with him. I’m mostly aggravated with myself for letting myself be strung along for so long. Live and learn, right?”

“Right. That’s a very mature attitude. Wait, back to what you said a few minutes ago. Sam and Quinn were dating and Quinn cheated on Sam with Finn?”

“Yes. Sam and Quinn had been dating since mid-October, so for a couple of months or so before she cheated on him. No less than that, 6 weeks or so. Rachel cheated on him with Puck in retaliation for something from last year and he broke up with her. Then he cheated with Quinn while she was seeing Sam.”

“I think you’re right about the counseling. That boy needs to get his head on straight. Quinn cheated on him with Puck. Now she’s cheated with Finn on Sam. What’s next? She cheats with another jock and breaks Finn’s heart again?”

“More likely, Rachel will seduce him again and he’ll cheat with Rachel on Quinn just like he did back in sophomore year.”

“The whole thing sounds like a damn soap opera.”

“It is. I mean think how long it took Quinn to tell Finn the truth about who the baby’s father was. I know people grow up and change, but she dated Sam for not even a couple of months and then she cheated on him with Finn. Obviously, she hasn’t really grown up. I wish Finn would date some other reasonably nice girl. There’s a bunch of Cheerios that would gladly date him, I’m sure.”

“I’m sure.”

“Don’t tell Finn that you know about him cheating with Quinn. He’ll know you got the information from me.”

“I won’t. I’m going to sit him down for ‘The Talk.’”

“That ship has sailed, Dad.”

“What?”

“No more info from me. He’ll know for sure you got the info from me, if I tell you anything else. But giving him the ‘You matter’ speech might a good idea before he ends up in bed with Quinn.”

“Well, this has been a surprisingly enlightening dinner providing me with all sorts of things I didn’t want to know. Being a dad is hard.”
By then, both of them had finished eating. Burt left a tip and they left. As they drove back toward Dalton, they continued to talk.

“You’re doing a good job. Look on the bright side, at least I won’t be calling you up and telling you my boyfriend is pregnant.” Kurt laughed.

“Very funny.”

“I thought so.”

“You don’t actually HAVE a boyfriend, right?”

“Nope. No boyfriend, but by the time I do, I hope you’ve gotten over your issue with ‘my potentially inappropriate’ behavior.”

“What do you mean?”

They pulled into the school drive.

“Pull over there into the visitor’s lot for a few minutes.”

*Now’s my chance to get him to understand.*

“I mean that by the time I find a guy I really like who likes me back, I hope that you will have realized that anything you might deem ‘inappropriate’ most of Lima will probably consider criminal and I hope that by then you will lift your nonsensical ban on male guests in my room.”

“Why would I do that?”

“Dad, really think about it. What did you do in high school? Did you ever go ‘parking’ or whatever it was called? You know – sitting in the back seat of a car making out with girls…”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“Where can I do that?” *Nowhere.*

“Oh.”

“Yeah. If you ban me from making out with my boyfriend in the privacy of my room, you’re banning me from ever making out. He and I will have to drive out of town and rent a hotel room just to cuddle and kiss.”

“I’ll think about it. It somehow has to be fair. I don’t let Finn have girls over in his room.”

“Well, for one thing Finn was dumb enough to believe that he had gotten Quinn pregnant when they had never had sex. And secondly, Finn can get his girlfriend pregnant. And lastly, Finn can kiss his girlfriend right in the middle of the hallway or in a classroom at school, in the front or backseat of his car, while walking down the sidewalk anywhere in Lima, in the middle of the mall, on a bench at the park – pretty much anywhere. On the other hand, I know how girls get pregnant, and since I am not interested in girls, I won’t be getting one pregnant, and I can’t kiss a boy any of those places that I just mentioned. So, life isn’t fair.”

“I get it.”

“The most important reason you need to change your stance is because you made me feel like crap when you called me potentially being intimate with a guy ‘inappropriate’. I would never, ever take
advantage of someone who was drunk. I am not a predator. What would have been inappropriate would have been for me to leave him at Rachel’s sleeping on the platform in her basement with no one to take care of him if he threw up in his sleep. It would have been inappropriate to leave him to sleep it off in the backseat of the Navigator. I did the appropriate thing, which was to stay sober. I took care of a human being that was incapable of taking care of himself. I slept in the chair in my room. We put him in my bed face down so if he threw up he wouldn’t choke on it.”

“It’s not easy for a parent to think of their child in that way. But you’re right. I need to get over myself. You’ll be 18 in less than three months. I have no reason to behave so overprotectively. I’m sorry about the ‘inappropriate’ statement. The whole situation was a mess.”

“I agree, but I’m not really able to control what someone else does. I just kept him from potentially dying in his sleep or making even worse drunken decisions than French kissing Rachel Berry. If I had left him with her with them both drunk out of their minds – a lot more inappropriate things could have happened. Think about Quinn and Puck. Him sleeping in my bed fully clothed doesn’t even come close to inappropriate if you really think about it.”

“And you’re not interested in him anymore?”

“Nope. I told him I liked him. I gave him a chance to act on that. He blew it big time. He chose to go out on a date with Rachel. Remember you told me that I matter?”

Burt nodded.

“This is me reminding myself that I matter. He had two and a half months of me just waiting for him. If he’s still searching that’s fine. It really is. I mean I knew for certain that I was gay and I dated Brittany that week. I just wanted to fit in. I wanted you to like me better. I understand that desire to be ‘normal’. But I’m done waiting around on the shelf until he runs out of other options.”

“Good for you.”

“I let it go after Valentine’s Day, but Rachel’s party and their date was the final blow. It still hurts a little because rejection always does, but mostly I’m just aggravated at myself at this point. I should have let it go back before winter break. I was so new to the whole idea of dating that I didn’t make myself ask the right questions. I just let myself misinterpret someone’s actions.” Over and over and over again.

“I know it still stings right now. But when you find the right person, you’ll realize what you would have given up by staying with the wrong person.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

“I’ll work on the revised house rules. It will probably require a family meeting after dinner this Friday or maybe next Friday depending on when I have the time to sit down and talk to Carole.”

“That’s fine. I’m willing to defend my point of view and hear Finn’s side. Maybe he’s willing to grow up enough to really listen. We’ll see I guess. Thanks for dinner tonight. Sorry you had to drive all the way over here just to sign that paper. But she insisted on seeing you in person for the first visit.”

“If she can get the school to pay, that would be great. And I got to spend time with you, so it’s all good.”

“I better get inside and get busy. I actually have quite a bit of homework to do tonight.”
“See ya tomorrow, kiddo.”

“Bye, Dad.”

Kurt waved from the steps as Burt drove off.
Right after Pavarotti was given to him, Kurt had arranged for the rest of the Warblers to take turns caring for him on the weekends so that Pavarotti wouldn’t have to go out in the cold, but this weekend it was his turn to keep him. While he was changing and getting his coat on, he thought about that. He had been at Dalton long enough for each of the Warblers to have cared for Pavarotti for part of the weekend so he could go home. He Pavarotti bundled Pavarotti up so he could head to Lima.

He refocused and grabbed his satchel and put it on over his head, wearing it crossbody to make carrying the bundled up cage easier. He had to head back to Dalton either Saturday evening or Sunday morning because the Warblers were holding an all-afternoon Sunday rehearsal because Regionals was coming up in two weeks and with all of the other clubs and sports rehearsals, it was practically impossible to schedule extra weekday rehearsals and manage to get the whole group there.

He stopped by the house and took Pavarotti up to his room and got him situated comfortably, and then drove straight to the shop and got busy working on the to-do list that had been left for him. Three hours later and a completed task list, he headed back home.

When he walked in the door, he could smell that dinner was already prepared and ready to eat. He used the sink in the laundry room to scrub his hands again and used the nailbrush he kept on the sink ledge to make his hands presentable for dinner.

He walked into the kitchen and found Carole finishing things up.

“Need any help?”

“Oh, sure, honey. You can carry those bowls to the table.”

Once everything was on the table, Burt hollered down to the family room for Finn to come up and eat. He came upstairs quickly and sat down. The four of them started passing the bowls of food around the table and serving themselves. Once they had what they wanted, they started to eat.

“So, tonight, we’re going to have an actual family meeting during dinner,” Burt said. “Finn and I had a talk last night and so did Carole and I.”

“Okay…” Finn said, somewhat confused and blushing.

Kurt realized what Burt had talked to Finn about.

“So,” Carole started. “Burt and I talked. The two of you are close to being adults, legally. You both have just one more year of school after this one. Burt and I were teenagers once upon a time, a long, long time ago.”

Kurt laughed.

“And Finn and I have already been through the pregnancy scare situation and lived through it. What we don’t want is a repeat of that. Finn is now fully aware of how that situation can be avoided, beyond the obvious choice of celibacy.”
Finn looked uncomfortable.

“The question has arisen as to what is our family rules need to be in regards to significant others.”

Finn looked confused.

“The rules about what you can do with your girlfriend here at home,” Burt clarified.

Finn nodded.

“Our bedroom is downstairs. The two of you have bedrooms upstairs on opposite ends of the hall. We all have a reasonable amount of privacy, which increases if the doors are closed,” Carole said.

“We have reconsidered our previous ‘open door’ policy. We are going to replace it with an ‘open visitation’ policy. Neither of us wants either of you sneaking off to sleazy motels.” Burt looked directly at Finn. “We don’t want anyone arrested for public indecency, which would probably happen to Kurt just for chastely kissing a boy in a car.”

“Wait a minute. I’m confused, I think. Did you just say that I can have Quinn over whenever I want? Like any time of day, even in my room, alone with the door closed?”

Burt laughed. “Yes, I did.”

“That’s like a huge change,” Finn said.

“It is,” Carole confirmed. “But in light of the fact that Kurt cannot be in any way intimate with a boy anywhere in Lima, his home has to be his safe place. If he and his boyfriend wanted to watch a movie and cuddle, like you and Quinn do at the theater, could he do the same?”

“Wait. Kurt has a boyfriend?”

“No, I don’t, Finn. She was just asking IF I could do the same thing with a boyfriend that you can do with a girlfriend. Could I go to the movie theater in town and sit with a boy the way you sit with Quinn?”

“Oh. No, definitely not.”

“That’s all she was pointing out.”

“Okay. I get it. Kurt can’t really date like the rest of us, so whenever he gets a boyfriend, their dates will have to be here at home. Like a movie and dinner in the family room or something.”

“Right,” Carole said. “Or, he and his boyfriend could watch a movie on his laptop in his room, if you have people over that evening and you’re using the family room.”

“And you’re actually serious?” Finn asked. “This isn’t some kind of weird not-really-April April Fool’s joke?”

“Nope, not a joke,” Burt confirmed. “It’s also not meant to be on the evening news. There’s no need to go blabbing at school about how your parents are cool enough to let you have sex in their house.”

Carole added, “I don’t think you and Quinn are at the ready-to-have-sex stage. And if you feel that you are, then you need to make sure that you take Quinn in for a visit to her OBGYN and that she is taking proper precautions to avoid pregnancy and that you are taking proper precautions to prevent STIs and that the two of you cover the cost of these precautions equally.”
Finn turned red. “Yeah, I get it. No more accidental pregnancies. If I was seriously looking for a girl that would put out, I wouldn’t be dating Quinn or Rachel for that matter.”

“Well, whoever you choose to date is up to you. Your choice of partner is up to you, and whoever it is will be welcome here,” Carole said.

“This rule does NOT apply to your friends,” Burt pointed out. “This will not become a teenage hookup venue. Your friends are welcome here. They are welcome to have their girlfriends or boyfriends with them. But anything that they wouldn’t want me or Carole to see them do – needs to not happen in this house.”

“Right. Got it,” Finn said.

“The last part of this deal is this,” Carole looked directly at Finn and spoke firmly. “Finn, if Kurt has someone here and you come home unexpectedly and you find another guy here, you will not say a word to anyone, ever. Do you understand?”

Burt said, “You are being given very lenient family rules. In return for our leniency, you will keep quiet about anyone Kurt might see. The person here could be someone that is not open about his sexuality to everyone. Kurt’s personal life is none of your business and is not to be a topic for the McKinley rumor mill. I know you struggle with keeping things to yourself, but this is REALLY important.”

“Got it.”

“So, repeat the rules to me, Finn,” Carole said pointedly.

“Kurt and I can have our girlfriend or boyfriend over any time we want day or night, anywhere in the house. Private things need to happen in our bedrooms with the doors closed.”

“Keep going,” Carole urged him.

“I can’t out anyone I might accidentally run into if I come home when Kurt isn’t expecting it. Oh, and none of our friends can come here to hookup.”

“Right,” Burt said. “One other thing you forgot.”

“Umm.”

“Don’t blab to everyone about our parents’ lenient rules,” Kurt supplied.

“Exactly,” Burt said. “If you do, your privileges will be revoked back to the ‘open doors at all times’ stage.”

“Got it,” Finn said.

“And if you ever out anyone that Kurt is seeing, you’ll be grounded until you move out of the house,” Burt added.

Finn looked mortified.

Carole specified, “No truck, no data or texting for your phone, no internet, no video games, no TV or movies, no friends over, no going out with anyone, etc.”

“Right. I won’t out anyone.”
“Good choice,” Burt said.

“We have one last issue to talk to the two of you about,” Carole said. “Underage drinking. We’re aware that the Glee Club is now amongst the groups of people that you associate with that is hosting drinking parties. There will be no drinking parties in this house, period. No alcohol. No exceptions. If we find out this rule has been broken, the participants in the drinking will be banned from the house. We will not allow underage drinking in this house.”

“Got it, Mom,” Finn said.

“The other issue with underage drinking. I’m aware that you two remained sober during the last New Directions party that involved drinking. I appreciate that. Should that ever NOT be the case, I expect you to call Carole’s cell phone and let her drive to wherever you are and pick you up. No questions asked. Both of us know that there are types of alcohol that do not smell and have no taste. We would rather you call Carole for a ride than risk allowing one of your friends to drive you. If necessary, we will drive your friends home as well.”

“Yeah, Mr. Schue made all of us sign pledges not to drink anymore. And he gave us his cell phone number. I don’t think there will be any more parties like that one any time soon.”

“Good,” Burt said. “But if you ever end up in a situation where you or your ride ends up drinking alcohol on purpose or by accident, call Carole.”

“We got it, Dad. We’ll call Carole. We won’t drive drunk and we won’t ride with a drunk driver.”

Kurt and Burt headed to the shop after lunch to meet up with Kurt to work on a special project that hadn’t been on his task list the day before. Kurt had seen the truck sitting on a lift, but hadn’t bothered looking at it since it wasn’t on his list of things to do.

Burt took him over to the truck, which was beautiful. It was a gorgeous metallic forest green and the body was in great shape – no dings or rust.

“This is our project. More mine than yours, but you can help me the weekends that you’re home. Some things are just easier with two people.”

“Alright.”

“This is Finn’s 18th birthday present. He doesn’t know, of course. And he doesn’t know enough about cars to help me fix it or to fix it himself like you did with the Nav. His truck is a piece of crap and I keep patching it back together to keep it running. It’s not the kind of vehicle he can drive anywhere besides around town. I want him to have a reliable vehicle.”

“Got it. So, what’s wrong with this beauty?”

“A lot of things. Eat that sandwich I brought you and we’ll get working on it.”

A few hours later, Burt’s phone pinged. He stopped and wiped his hands off to read the text message. “Carole got called into work to cover someone’s shift, so it’s just the two of us tonight. So, how about when we’re done here, we go home, clean up and go out to dinner and movie, just the two of us?”

“I’d like that.”
“Then, that’s what we’ll do. Let’s get back to this for now.”

Kurt was up early the next morning, which was bright and sunny, sitting at his vanity doing the long version of his skin care regime that he only did once a month. He was whistling and interacting with Pavarotti when the bird fell off his perch. Kurt rushed to the cage to see what had happened. Pavarotti was dead.

He broke down crying. He had never had a pet before and he had grown to love listening to Pavarotti tweet and chirp. He had lost McKinley, lost his family in a way with rarely getting to be at home, lost the hope he had been clinging to about Blaine, and now he had lost his beloved pet.

He sat back down and finished what he had started. Rather than dressing in his uniform, he dressed in black from head to toe. He moved Pavarotti’s body to a small box and stored it in the shed until he could figure out what to do. He packed up the rest of his stuff, grabbed an old tape he had of Beatles backing tracks, fast forwarded it to the song he wanted to sing, and headed back to Dalton.

The delayed departure caused him to arrive to the rehearsal late. He pushed both doors open and entered the room out of uniform.

Blaine was the first to speak. “Kurt, what’s wrong?”

“It’s Pavarotti. Pavarotti’s dead. I suspect a stroke.”

“Oh, my God. I’m so sorry.” Blaine said. Everyone else remained silent, eyes glued to Kurt.

“I know it’s really stupid to be so upset about a bird, but… he inspired me with his optimism and his love of song. He was my friend. Now, I know today that we need to practice doo wopping behind Blaine while he sings every solo in a medley of P!nk songs, but…”

At this point, Trent looked away from Kurt in an attempt to not visibly react to the shade he was throwing at Blaine.

“I’d like to sing a song for Pavarotti today.” Kurt pulled out the tape and handed it to Jamison, who was sitting on the arm of the couch, closest to where Kurt was standing. Jamison got up, put it in a tape player, and pressed play. Guitar music started and Kurt started singing “Blackbird”.

The Warblers joined in singing back up while Kurt continued to sing. Blaine had a look of realization on his face. Blaine came back to the moment and sang again. The song came to an end.

A few tears streamed down Kurt’s cheeks. “Thank you.” He turned around, removed his tape from the player, put it back in his jacket and left the rehearsal room. He went back to his dorm room for about a half-hour, changed into the proper attire, and headed back to the rehearsal.

The rehearsal continued for quite a while. They had spent all of their afterschool rehearsals working on their arrangements and the vocals. That afternoon they spent several hours working on their choreography. By the time dinnertime came around, the council decided that they would order pizzas. When Wes got the text that the pizzas had arrived, Trent and Kurt volunteered to go get them and bring them back.

Kurt stepped outside and saw Sam, who gave Kurt a polite pizza delivery guy smile.

“Step inside. It will be easier to get the pizzas out of those bags that way,” Kurt said.
Sam stepped in while Kurt held the exterior door and Trent opened the interior door.

“There’s a table right over there we can stack them on,” Kurt pointed.

Sam followed him. He and Trent unloaded the insulated carriers. Kurt managed to sneak an extra $10 bill out of his wallet and add it to the cash he had in his hand.

Kurt spoke to Trent. “Go ahead and take them down to the room. I’ll see him out.”

Trent nodded and grabbed the boxes and headed back to the Warblers’ practice room.

Kurt walked with Sam back toward the doors. “Do you have more deliveries to make?”

“I don’t get off until 9:00.”

“Come back when you’re done, please. Text me when you’re here.” Kurt handed Sam his phone so he could send himself a text and have Kurt’s phone number stored.

“Alright.” Sam handed Kurt his phone back.

Kurt handed him the cash for the pizzas. “I’ll see you later.”

Sam nodded and headed back to his truck.

Kurt returned to the practice room, ate pizza with everyone, and rehearsed more.

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After they were finally dismissed, Kurt headed to his room and changed into Dalton-issued navy blue sweats so he could still roam around the building without getting demerits, but he wouldn’t feel so stuffy talking to Sam once he finally arrived. Sam texted him about ten after nine, and he opened the door so quickly that he made Sam jump.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to startle you. I’ve been in the lobby since 9:00. I didn’t want to make you wait standing on the front steps in the dark. Come on in.”

“Am I allowed inside?”

“We have a visitor’s room where people that show up without notice have to wait, like people who just stop by and want to know more about the school or something. And it’s where we can take people who come to visit us that we don’t have visitor’s passes for. It’s right over there.” Kurt pointed. “Curfew is at 10:00 on school nights, so you have to be out of the building by then.”

Sam followed Kurt to the visitor’s room, which reminded him of a small doctor’s office waiting room. There were a few double chairs and several single chairs sitting up against the walls around the room. There were a few side tables with magazines on them as well. Kurt shut the door behind them, and then sat down on one of the double seats. Sam sat next to him.

“What’s going on, Sam? Why are you delivering pizzas way out here in Westerville?”

Sam broke down. Kurt put his hand on Sam’s.

“My dad lost his job three months ago. If we don’t pay the two missed months on our mortgage, plus the late fees by the end of the month, they’re going to foreclose on our house. I took this job in addition to the one I work in Lima on weekdays. My dad took a part-time job at McDonald’s, and my mom still works full time at the daycare, but I don’t think we’re going to be able to come up with
enough money in time.”

“Why way out here?”

“I couldn’t find anything else in Lima. My dad has tried too. Not many places are hiring right now.”

“Sam, I’m really sorry to hear that things are so hard. Is there anything I can do to help?”

“If you know of any jobs, I guess.”

“I don’t, but I can offer you a hug, if you want one.”

Sam practically fell into Kurt’s arms. Kurt rubbed his back.

“No one knows,” he said as he tried to get his breathing under control.

“I won’t say a word, Sam. I can keep secrets. I know that people think I’m a gossip, but that’s just about celebrity stuff and the way people dress – not about important things.”

“I know.”

“Really?”

“Really. I KNOW and I haven’t said anything either. I figured it out after you left.”

“What do you mean?”

“No one who hates someone is THAT upset when he comes back to find the object of his hatred gone. I was in the locker room when Azimio and Karofsky were talking after Karofsky came back. Azimio told him that you weren’t coming back. I guess he heard it from Finn. Anyway, after Azimio left and Karofsky thought he was alone, I heard him slam his hand into his locker and swear. If he hated you and wanted you dead, he would have been glad you were gone.”

“Oh.”

“So, I figure he did something to you and then threatened to kill you if you told. My best guess is that he somehow outed himself to you. That would be one thing that a jock known for being homophobic would threaten to kill someone over.”

“You’re a regular Sherlock Holmes, aren’t you?”

Sam pulled back from the hug and laughed. “I’ve missed you.”

“Thank you. You’re the first person to say so.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“I want to tell you something. This just seems too serendipitous for me to pass up my chance.”

“Alright.”

“I really, really wanted to sing with you.”

“Oh.”
“Your one-person duet rocked though. I loved it. But I really wanted to sing with you. I let Finn get to me when I should have stood my ground.”

“I let Finn and my dad get to me.”

Sam looked confused.

“My dad thought I was pressuring you to sing with me because I liked you and he told me not to put that kind of pressure on you given the way the school is. Finn told me I’d ruin your reputation – that everyone would think you were gay if you sang with me.”

“I wanted to win and go to Breadstix with you.”

Kurt looked confused.

“I’ll be more clear. I like guys. I thought you were cute and I wanted to go to Breadstix with you.”

Kurt’s confusion slipped down to dumbfounded. “But you dated Quinn.”

“I’ve heard that you dated Brittany.”

“Touché.”

“I knew I liked guys. I went to an all-boys school before we moved to Ohio. That day in the locker room, when you set me free – I thought you had figured out that I liked you and that you were setting me free ahead of the competition so that you wouldn’t have to tell me to my face that you didn’t like me and that you didn’t want go to Breadstix with me – like you were letting me down easy.”

“Oh. Definitely not. I did like you. I thought you were adorable, actually. The day you walked in Glee and Santana said you had no game, I was definitely disagreeing with her in my head.” Kurt laughed.

“Ah, well she came after me wanting me to date her after Quinn cheated on me. But she was implying that I just be eye candy that she could parade around. As scary as it was, I turned her down. I learned the hard way with Quinn. No more dating people who find my personality unattractive.”

“Good for you. I’ve come to a similar conclusion lately, but I skipped the actual dating the person part and just came to pretty much the same conclusion.”

“Blaine?”

“You got it.”

“So, back to me liking you and you liking me.”

Kurt blushed. God, he’s cute.

“So, you do still like me?”

Kurt barely nodded. “I moved you into the ‘straight jock’ file that has a big ‘NO’ stamped on the outside.”

“I’m figuring that has something to do with Finn being a jerk because you had a crush on him last year.”
“Exactly.”

“He should have been flattered.”

Kurt blushed more. **SO adorable.**

“So, here’s the truth. You were my first choice, but I thought you didn’t like me back, so I backed off. Everyone was pushing me towards Quinn and I went with it. I figured I should do my best to blend in since I wasn’t going to come out if you didn’t want to date me. I did my best to be a good boyfriend to her, but we never really clicked. There was no spark of course. She seemed okay with that. Maybe being with me kept her from being alone and from being hit on by other guys. I’m not sure of her reasoning, but obviously there was no real commitment on her part because she left me for Finn. She was the first person I’ve ever actually dated. And I guess as far as first dating experiences go, it was okay.”

“Same for me and Brittany. No love loss. I’m definitely gay. She knew I was gay, but she offered. Dating her was something I chose to do. I thought maybe I could be okay with it, but I wasn’t. But like you said, no broken heart.”

“So, you and Blaine?”

“Not happening. He needs to figure himself out and not with me.”

Sam took Kurt’s hand. “I know this is not the best timing since I’m still in Lima and you’re here most of the time, but would you consider dating me?”

“Yes. I’d like that.” **Oh, my God. Yes!**

“Can I kiss you?”

Kurt blushed and nodded. **Definitely.** He moved closer to Sam again. Sam leaned forward and their lips met gently. Sam pulled back a little, giving Kurt an out if he wanted it. Kurt leaned in and reattached their lips and kissed him with a little more pressure than the gentle, barely-there first kiss. Kurt put his hands on Sam’s shoulders and Sam put his hands on Kurt’s waist and pressed in and they continued to kiss for a couple of minutes, just chaste kisses, but with desire behind them. Sam was the first to say anything after they broke apart, pressing their foreheads together.

“Wow.”

“I agree.”

“Definitely gay.”

Kurt laughed and teased him. “One kiss and no more girls?”

He was breathing hard. “Yeah, not that I was ever into girls, but you’re not even really touching me anywhere and I need a cold shower.” He laughed nervously.

“Well, I guess the upside is that I’m not a girl and I like that?” **He’s THAT attracted to me?**

“Oh, you do?” he teased.

“Definitely.” Kurt tipped his head up and started kissing Sam again. “It means that you’re enjoying this as much as I am.” Kurt tried to scoot closer, but sitting the way they were was not helping. He broke the kiss. “Stand up so we can kiss easier.”
Sam stood up. Kurt stood too. He wrapped his arms around Sam’s torso and put his hands up between Sam’s shoulder blades and started kissing him again. Sam steadied himself and wrapped his arms around Kurt’s waist. Kurt hadn’t moved past this type of kissing with Brittany, but he had seen other people French kiss. He just barely licked at Sam’s lower lip, which caused Sam to moan. He pulled Kurt closer and licked back. Five minutes into their making out, Kurt’s phone beeped. He kissed Sam one more time and took a step back, trying to catch his breath.

“You have to go or I’ll get demerits if they catch you in here after curfew.”

Sam took a step closer and kissed Kurt one more time. “Will you be my boyfriend, Kurt Hummel?” he asked with a huge, cheesy smile on his face.

“I will, Sam Evans.” Kurt reached out and took Sam’s hand and started to walk towards the door.

“When will you be in Lima?”

They kept walking toward the entryway doors.

“Friday. Do you work on here in Westerville next weekend?”

“Yes, but I don’t have to be here until 2:00 on Saturday.”

“We’ll have our first date Friday night, if that’s okay? And a second one on Saturday?”

“Sounds perfect. I have no money for dates though.”

“Ah, well, the Friday date will be at my house and will be completely free. You can even spend the night if your parents will let you.”

“Really?”

“Yep. Do they know you’re gay?”

“Yeah. I told them ages ago, like when I was 14.”

“And how old are you now?”

“17. My birthday is in May.”

“Mine too. Well, if they’ll let you stay over, my dad’s fine with it. And Finn is sworn to secrecy about any boyfriend I have. He’ll be grounded until he moves out if he outs anyone.”

Sam looked confused.

“House rules. My dad knows there aren’t a lot of guys willing to be open about liking other guys. If Finn outs anyone I date, he’ll lose his truck, his video games, and a long list of things that will make him feel like he lives in a monastery.”

“Oh, wow.”

“So, you have to go and you can text me and we can plan the details for Friday after you talk to your parents. I’ll get you a pass to spend the night in my dorm for Saturday if I can. If not, I’ll work out something as long as your parents will let you stay overnight in Westerville.” He stepped closer and kissed him one last time.

Sam stepped out the door.
Kurt called out, “I’ll call you tomorrow and see you Friday.”

He waved from the sidewalk and walked to his truck in the visitor’s lot.

Kurt headed back up to his room on cloud nine. He had had his first amazing kiss with a boy. He decided right then, that from then on, he would answer that the kiss with Sam had been his first amazing kiss with a boy and he would never have to think about answering differently.

Sam.

Once he was in his room, he called Burt.

“Hey, Dad.”

“It’s pretty late, bud. Is something wrong?”

“No, for once, everything is really right.”

“You sound really happy. What’s up?”

“You wanted me to tell you when I got a boyfriend.”

“Yeah.”

“Well, I have a boyfriend.”

“That was quick. I didn’t know you even liked anyone else at Dalton.”

“I don’t. He doesn’t go to school here.”

“I’m confused.”

“His parents know that he likes guys, but no one else knows – well of course I do now.” He laughed.

“So, who is it?”

“Sam.”

“Sam on the football team at McKinley? That Sam?”

“The one and only.”

“So, you were right?”

“I was.”

“So, he’s your boyfriend now. That was quick, but alright.”

“We’re having our first official date at the house Friday night, details pending us arranging the date. He had to leave because I can’t have visitors in the building past curfew. I’ll tell you more at some point. But I have some reading I have to finish before tomorrow. Warbler practice lasted a lot longer today than I thought it would. And then Sam was here for about 45 minutes. I’ll call you tomorrow. I just wanted to do what you asked and not keep secrets from you.”
“Well, I appreciate that, kiddo. I guess our new house rules are going to get a trial run sooner than I had thought.”

“That’s true. We’ll work something out tomorrow when I call.”

“Goodnight, kiddo.”

“Night.”

Kurt was waiting outside the school office when it opened. He stepped inside as soon as the door opened.

“Good morning, Kurt. What can I do for you today? Did you manage to find some people still looking for a tutor?”

“I did. I found four people, which I have the vouchers for.” He handed her four signed sheets. “I have a question. What are the rules about overnight guests on Saturday nights?”

“Well, no girls overnight. Girls can stay until midnight as long as they have passes ahead of time. Guys can spend the night with a pass, but only on Friday and Saturday nights. No overnight guests on school nights. Oh, and overnight visitors have to be high school age, between 13 and 19, or get special permission from the headmaster.”

“Alright, then. I’d like a pass for my friend to stay the night here this Saturday and probably most Saturdays for the foreseeable future.”

Miss Burns looked confused.

“He’s a friend from Lima. He had to take a job delivering pizzas here in Westerville due to some serious financial trouble for his family. He’s driving over here and back on both Saturday and Sunday. Staying with me Saturday night would allow him to save $30 in gas, which he desperately needs. He already works weeknights in Lima. He took a second job here on the weekends. He’s trying to help save their house from going into foreclosure.”

“That’s a lot of pressure on a high school student.”

“It is. I just thought if it isn’t against the rules, he could stay with me and save the $30 in gas and the wear and tear on his truck.”

“I don’t see a problem since it doesn’t break any of the school rules. Keep in mind that he has to follow all of the school rules while he’s here. And he can’t be anywhere without a student with him.”

“I will be sure that he follows all of the rules.”

“Good.” She pulled a pad out of her desk. “What is his name again?”

“Samuel Evans.”

She wrote his name on the pass, dated, signed it, and handed it to Kurt.

“Thank you.”

“No problem. I hope things improve for them. It would be awful for them to lose their house.”
“It would be.”

“Wait here and I’ll get your money for the tutoring sessions.” She came back a couple of minutes later and handed Kurt three $20 bills, which Kurt put in his wallet.

“Thank you.”

“I’ll see you next Monday, Kurt.”

Kurt smiled and nodded. He headed off to his classes.

At lunch, he texted Sam.

To Sam: I got you a pass for Saturday night. Oh, and put a passcode on your phone right now, if you don’t have one.

From Sam: Already did that. I have a little brother and sister who can both read now. So, I can stay there Sat nite?

To Sam: Yep, every Saturday night. It will let you keep $30 more since you’ll save that much in gas.

From Sam: Extent. Ill talk to my mom when she gets home tnite. Even if shes not thrilled $30 will help cnvnce her.

To Sam: Can I tell my dad? He knows tons of people. Maybe he could put in a good word for your dad somewhere.

From Sam: Ill ask my mom. Ill let you know tnite. Gotta run. Xtra Glee ptcie during lunch.

Kurt sat and read the book he had been assigned to read in English until Warblers rehearsal started. He kept to himself and did what he was supposed to. He had learned the steps easily and was quite capable of the doo wopping being required of him. As soon as it ended, he grabbed his stuff and headed to the study room on his floor for his tutoring session.

When the hour was up and the voucher had been signed, he headed to his own room to get more of his work done before dinner. He wanted to be able to spend time talking to Sam whenever he called, which turned out not to be until nearly 10:00.

“Hey, Sam.”

“Sorry it’s so late. I had to work, then I had to at least do some of my homework, and then I talked to my mom.”

“It’s fine. Really. What did she say?”

“Well, I told her about us. She was happy. She knew I liked you last fall.”

*He had told his mom back last fall? That made Kurt feel even better about moving ahead so quickly.*

“She says I can stay at your place here on Friday and I can stay in Westerville on Saturday nights. She feels really bad about me having to work so much and she said I deserve to be a teenager at least part of the time. She says you can tell your dad, but no one else. And she asked that he be discreet
about it. My dad doesn’t want word to get back to the manager at McDonald’s and get let go because he’s looking for other work. Thirty hours is a lot better than zero.”

He went on to explain what had happened with the job his dad had been working.

“I wish I could talk longer, but I’m nearly failing all of my classes now. If I don’t pull my grades up, I’m going to have to repeat all of my classes. I’m working 20 hours a week at the gas station and I’m working 16 hours on the weekends delivery pizzas, plus the 6 hours of driving there and back.”

“I won’t keep you, but how about an offer to help you this weekend? I’ll explain anything you don’t understand and help you in any way that I can. If you’ve missed assignments, go to your teachers tomorrow and ask to be allowed to turn them in for partial credit. Explain that you’re working 42 hours a week. Even if half of them let you turn in things for half-credit, your grades will go up.”

“It’s just really embarrassing. I was making Bs and Cs before.”

“Which is why they will be able to see the huge difference and realize that you are telling the truth.”

“Alright. I’ll try tomorrow. Thanks.”

“No problem. What time do you get off on Friday?”

“I work 4:00-8:00 Monday through Friday at the gas station. I split the evening shift with another person who works from 8:00-midnight.”

“Okay. How about I meet you at your house at 8:30 and bring you home with me? That way no one will see your truck in my driveway. We can swing by your place on the way to Westerville on Saturday to pick up your truck.”

“I’m not going to stay in the closet, Kurt. I won’t do that to you.”

“Let’s just do it this way until after Regionals and then we’ll talk. I don’t want you to rush into a decision and have a bunch of busybodies pressuring you until you break up with me.”

“We’ll talk about it. But we’ll go with your plan for this weekend.”

“I’ll let you get back to studying. Call me whenever you have time to talk. I’m looking forward to Friday.”

“Me too.”

Friday.

{}o{}o{}o{}o{}

“Hey, Dad.”

“Hey, kiddo. What’s up?”

“Sorry to call so late again, but I had to wait for Sam to call before I could call you. He talked to his mom and she said I could tell you something very private that you can’t tell anyone else.”

“Alright.”

“Sam’s family is less than a month away from losing their house. Three months ago, Sam’s dad lost the job that brought them to Lima last August. He was working for a company that downsized and
just closed the Lima office with only two weeks’ warning. His dad hasn’t been able to find another
good job since then. He’s been working 30 hours a week at McDonald’s for a couple of months and
Sam has taken on a second job delivering pizzas here in Westerville to try to make ends meet. But if
they don’t pay the two months missing mortgage payments plus the late fees by the end of this
month, the bank is going to foreclose on their house.”

“That seems awfully quick.”

“I know nothing about that part. I just know that his mom is working full time at a daycare for
minimum wage, I’m guessing, but it allows Sam’s little brother and sister to stay there at no cost until
6:00 when she gets off. His dad is working 30 hours a week at minimum wage and Sam is working
36 hours now between his two jobs. But Sam is about to fail all of his classes because he doesn’t
have time to get his schoolwork done.”

“I need to talk to his dad.”

“Alright. Don’t tell anyone else, even Carole, until his dad says it’s okay. They’re afraid that if word
gets around that he’s looking for a different job that he’ll get fired from McDonald’s.”

“I got it. I’ll do what I can, Kurt. I ask around to see who’s hiring. What hours is his dad working
now?”

“I think he said he works 4-5 hours every evening, including weekends.”

“So, if I could find a daytime job that’s part time, he could at least take that for now.”

“Yeah.”

“I’ll do what I can. Have his dad come down to the shop tomorrow morning when we open.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Sam?”

“Yeah. I won’t keep you. Just tell you dad to go talk to my dad at the shop tomorrow morning at
9:00.”

“Okay.”

“Night, Sam.”

“Night.”

“So Trent and I eat breakfast together and he conscripted Nick and Jeff to eat lunch with us. He
persuaded me to show Nick and Jeff the videos from McKinley. Neither one of them made fun of me
at all – not even ‘good-natured’ teasing.”

“So, now you’re spending time with three students, you’re tutoring four students, and you seem a lot
happier.”
“Well, there’s another reason for that.”

“Oh?”

“Well, there’s this guy that I had a crush on last fall when he joined the New Directions at McKinley. He was so adorable. Anyway. Last Sunday, I found out that he is, in fact, gay. He liked me then, but through some circumstances that I won’t bother to explain he mistakenly thought that I didn’t like him in that way.”

“And now?”

“And now, we’re dating. I thought he was straight, so I just let the whole thing drop, but finding out that he’s not straight was awesome – one of his favorite words.”

“I see.”

“I told my dad and he’s fine with it. He’s coming over to my house Friday night after he gets off work.”

“Well, I hope things go well for the two of you.”

“Me too. His family is struggling, but my dad is trying to help them.”

“Your dad’s a good guy from what you’ve told me.”

“He really is.”

“How is the advocate working out?”

“We met last Thursday, but I haven’t heard from her since then. I’m not sure how long these types of things take.”

“Hopefully, not long. What do you think of the College and Career Seminar?”

“Oh, it’s really informative. I’ve already learned a lot. That government website about careers is really informative.”

“What’s the most interesting thing you’ve learned so far?”

“That master mechanics make more than off-Broadway stars.”

“I see.”

“Not what you expected as an answer?”

“I didn’t really anticipate anything specific. You tend to surprise me more frequently than not. So, what are you doing with this interesting piece of information?”

“Considering my options. I want to perform. I’ve always thought New York City was my Mecca.”

“And now?”

“Now, I’m thinking about the fact that I could pay off a really nice house in a decent, medium-sized city in less than the 10 years that it would take to pay off the loans I would need to attend college in New York City at one of the top schools, while working part time and auditioning. I could finish up my certifications in a year, while living at home for free and being paid to work in my dad’s shop. In
two years’ time, I could save up enough for a really good down payment, move to a more gay-friendly area, get a job as a mechanic, buy a house and pay it off in five years. And by 25, I could own a really nice house, be completely debt free, start auditioning for roles, and still work part time and never have to worry about money.”

“That’s an interesting line of thought.”

“And I’ve looked through a ton of career pages and the requirements and the pay ranges. I mean, that’s one of the assignments, but all of it is just making me think a lot.”

“Well, that’s good. The seminar is doing its job then.”

“Yeah, I guess, but it’s making me doubt everything I thought I had figured out.”

“Better to have doubts now and work through them than to enroll in a $50,000 a year school and start having doubts 6 weeks in after you can’t get $25,000 in tuition money back.”

“That’s true.” Kurt looked at the clock and stood up. “I need to get going. I’ll see you next week.”

Kurt finished his tutoring session and went back to his room, hoping that he could catch someone at the theater company in Columbus. He managed to catch the secretary who said she’d have someone call him back. Soon, hopefully.

He saw that he had missed a call. He listened to his voicemail. His preliminary arbitration meeting had been scheduled for the next Friday in Lima. Mrs. Huntington had already gotten him excused from school for the afternoon. Swell. Hopefully, it will be worth having to get notes from someone.

He pulled out a few short assignments he could get done quickly and finished them before heading to dinner.

He put his tray down with Trent, Nick, and Jeff. “I’ll be right back.”

He looked around until he found Wes. He sat down next to him and spoke quietly. “I know we don’t typically hold rehearsals on Fridays, but just in case I wanted to let you know that I won’t be at Dalton the Friday afternoon before Regionals.”

“Why?”

“Do I have to answer that?”

“I guess not.”

“It’s an official matter that I have no control over. Let’s just leave it at that.”

“Alright, Kurt. Obviously, it’s not a personal choice you are making. Thank you for letting me know.”

Kurt nodded as he stood. “You’re welcome.” He went back and sat down where he had left his tray.

“So, how’s the tutoring going?” Nick asked. “I’ve thought about doing it next year to add to my CV.”

“It’s fine. All you have to do is help the person so they can do their homework. You’ve gone to school here since you started high school. Helping people be able to do homework you’ve probably
already done shouldn’t be very hard.”

“That’s true.”

“Are you excited about Regionals?” Trent asked.

“I still think we’re going to lose,” Kurt answered honestly.

“Aren’t you just a ray of sunshine?” he spouted back.

“That’s your job, Trent. I’m the sullen freak, remember?”

“Yes, of course. How could I forget?”

“We don’t have the ‘wow’ factor we need to beat the New Directions.”

“Even with our improved choreography?”

“They have pretty girls in twirly dresses. We have our uniforms, which have zero ‘wow’ to them. I mean, we’d look better if we ditched the blazers, wore our red vests and rolled our sleeves to mid forearm. We could at least add in more movement and move freely. Plus red is at least more eye catching than navy blue.”

“Maybe next year,” Jeff said. “Wes will never go for anything besides our blazers.”

They talked and ate. After a while of no one saying anything, Kurt asked, “Why are the three of you in most of my classes if you’re all sophomores? I thought you were juniors, just like I thought Blaine was a junior since Wes referred to him as a junior Warbler or whatever his exact wording was.”

Trent answered, “Well, the three of us are in most of your classes because we all went to the same private middle school in Toledo where the curriculum is set so that 8th graders take freshman level courses for credit. To get into top schools like my parents want me to, I have to take AP courses my senior year. The only way to do that is to start early. We’re not in math with you because we’re already ahead of you. We took Geometry and Algebra 2 last year. We’re in Trig/Precalc this year. I have to be in order to take AP Calculus AB next year and then AP Calculus BC my senior year.”

“So, all of you started high school with high school credits already?”

Jeff answered, “Yes. We took French 1, English 9, Algebra 1, World History, and Biology for high school credit in the 8th grade. Our electives weren’t for high school credit. So, we started with 10 credits.”

“Interesting. McKinley has 6 classes a semester like we do here, but most everyone takes a study hall after freshman year when we had to take PE, so they end up having the 42 credits needed. But I didn’t take a study hall, which I guess is the only reason I would be able to graduate here next year since I didn’t start high school already having credits.”

“Well, it’s good you didn’t take a study hall then,” Nick said.

They continued to talk about the differences between public and private schools.

The next afternoon in Warblers rehearsal, Kurt looked bored out of his mind over the arguing about what songs were going to be sung at Regionals. They already had everything ready to go, what was
this last minute waffling on what to sing? Kurt was envisioning extra-long, perhaps even a weekend-long rehearsal that would be needed to change up what they were singing. He came back to the present when Blaine spoke up.

“I’m tired of the Warblers being all about me. David, please make sure everything I’m about to say goes down in the official minutes.”

David picked up his pencil and prepared to write down what Blaine said verbatim.

“We are going to lose at Regionals.”

A lot of distressed replies were heard.

“I’m incredibly grateful for the belief you’ve all given me as a junior member to lead you all in all of these wonderful songs this year, but from what Kurt has told me about New Directions, I just know that I can’t beat them on my own.”

At this point, Kurt wasn’t able to hide the look of shock on his face.

“Which is why I propose that we rearrange our 11:00 number and turn it into a duet.”

Kurt looked at him like he had lost his mind. Trent looked utterly confused. Lots of people were vocalizing their lack of understanding in changing the set list.

“To showcase other talent in this group.”

David had clearly had it. He put his hands up in frustration. “Why don’t we just play it on kazooos?” Obviously, he thought Blaine’s idea was ridiculous.

“Point of order. Point of order.” Blaine belted out to get the focus back on what he was saying since he had the floor. “We lost one of our own this week – Pavarotti’s voice was silenced by death and I don’t want to silence anyone else’s voice in this group. I think Pavarotti would roll over in his tiny, tiny little grave.”

Kurt quietly said, “The placement of which has yet to be determined.”

Wes spoke up. “Alright. A vote. Who’s in favor of Warbler Blaine’s proposal for a dual lead at Regionals?”

Pretty much everyone in the room raised their hand.

Kurt looked directly at Wes and said, “Can I put my name on that audition list?”

Blaine firmly responded with, “No. No auditions.”

Kurt looked confused.

“I want to sing the duet with Kurt.” He looked over at Kurt with a very charming smile on his face.

“That’s ridiculous. I mean there’s so many great voices. I mean, everyone deserves a shot at that honor,” Kurt countered.

Blaine didn’t back down. “All in favor of Kurt being my duet partner at Regionals.”

Most of the hands in the room went up.
Wes banged his gavel. “Decided.”

“Congratulations, Kurt,” Thad said.

Kurt was stunned and everyone started clapping. Blaine had a huge smile on his face. What in the hell is going on?

During lunch, Blaine was looking for Kurt. He asked several people and finally someone responded that they had seen him in the study room at the end of the hall near the Warblers’ practice room. Blaine found him there.

“What’s that?” he asked as he walked in.

“I’m decorating Pavarotti’s casket.”

“Well, finish up. I have the perfect song for our number and we should practice.” He walked over to the table and stood behind a chair at the table Kurt was sitting at.

“Do tell,” Kurt said as he looked up from his project.

“Candles’ by Hey Monday.”

“Unusual choice. You’re usually so Top 40.”

Blaine pulled the chair back and sat down. “I just wanted something a little more emotional.”

Kurt looked a little confused, then looked Blaine directly in the eyes and asked, “Why did you pick ME to sing that song with?”

Blaine couldn’t maintain Kurt’s eye contact. He looked down, closed his eyes and began to speak. “Kurt, there is a moment when you say to yourself, ‘Oh, there you are. I’ve been looking for you forever.’” Blaine reached out and put his hand over Kurt’s on the table.

Kurt wanted to jerk his hand back, but he wanted to hear what Blaine had to say more, so he just listened.

“Watching you do ‘Blackbird’ this week – that was a moment for me – about you.” He looked back up. “You move me, Kurt. And this duet would just be an excuse to spend more time with you.”

Blaine rose up out of his chair and took a step towards Kurt and attempted to kiss him.


Blaine sat back down and looked at Kurt confused. “Isn’t this what you’ve wanted?”

“It was, for a long time – far too long, but not now. After the GAP Attack and Rachel’s party, I let it go. I thought we had been casually dating before Valentine’s Day, Blaine. I thought you were just shy about being official.”

Blaine sat there.

“The day you announced the GAP Attack, I was shocked as I sat there listening to you say that you were in LOVE with the assistant manager. I had to keep it together in front of the whole group, after
I had supported your idea. I later told you that I thought you were going to sing to me. You didn’t even respond with a sincere apology. Before that you had told me you were bad at romance. I didn’t get it when you said that, but I eventually got the message.”

Kurt started packing up his bejeweling supplies.

“I can’t do this to myself. I can’t let myself be drawn in by your charm again. I came here to get away from the bullying. And while what you’ve done isn’t exactly bullying, it has been pretty difficult to deal with. And today, I didn’t agree to be kissed. We weren’t already dating. That kiss wasn’t frightening like Karofsky’s, but it was just as unanticipated and uninvited.”

“Kurt…”

“I know you don’t mean to hurt me. At least I don’t think you mean to. I believe you’re a decent person. But you need to think before you act. You got Jeremiah fired that day. You OUTED him. When he came out and told you, you didn’t even apologize then.”

“He walked away.”

Kurt refused to be drawn into Blaine’s side. “I can’t sing ‘Candles’ with you. The two of us singing ‘Candles’ is a much faster way to lose than you singing ‘Misery’. Judges in Ohio are not going to appreciate two guys singing a melancholy, slow breakup song together. What will the rest of the group be doing? They can’t dance to that song. There’s not a lot of intricate vocal work for them to do. It’s not a winning choice.”

He looked up from what he was doing and looked Blaine in the eyes.

“And if the only reason you chose me was to spend more time with me, then I don’t want to sing with you. If we’re going to switch out ‘Misery’ for a featured duet, the best voice to blend with yours should be the one chosen to sing with you.”

“You’re serious. You’d turned down singing lead at Regionals?”

“I would. And I will. I’m already singing co-lead with you on ‘Animal’. It’s not the same as a featured duet, but it will certainly not tank our chances of winning.”

“Wow. This did not go like I expected.”

“I imagine not. You seem to function on the premise that what you want to happen will be what happens. You’re overly optimistic.”

“Being optimistic is bad?”

“Being overly optimistic is way too far from reality. Self-confidence and optimism are good. But not taking into consideration other people’s feelings when predicting an outcome leaves you wondering how things went wrong and unable to learn from your mistakes, I think.”

“I don’t get what you mean.”

“You didn’t take into account how I’d feel about your public declaration of love for Jeremiah. You didn’t take into account how HE would feel about it. You didn’t take into account how I would feel about you kissing Rachel, while you were French kissing her 12 inches in front of me. I know it was a stupid party game and you were drunk, but the other people who were not dating each other didn’t French kiss. Then you sang with her – a flirty duet. Then you agreed to go on a date with her and compared ME to Karofsky. You know as well as I do that he threatened to kill me because I found
out that HE was gay, not because I was gay.”

“Right.”

“Everyone knows that I’m gay, Blaine. I answered the way I did in the Lima Bean because there were other people around who could have been listening in. I couldn’t say the truth sitting in a PUBLIC coffee shop, now could I? He threatened to kill me to prevent me from telling other people the truth about him. I made one stupid remark about bisexuality, which I KNOW exists, and I already apologized for.”

“I know.”

“I confronted you for questioning your sexuality after YOU had told me you were gay. I was angry, Blaine. You KNEW that I liked you, but you didn’t want to risk messing up our friendship to give dating a try. I accepted that. But then you were willing to go out with the girl who always got chosen over me. You chose her over me. A girl. My only GAY friend chose to date a GIRL rather than date me. The little bit my heart had healed, broke open again.”

“I needed to answer that question for myself. I needed to know.”

“I’m aware of that. But you didn’t have to compare me to a self-loathing bully who physically injured me for years. You could have said I was being unfair to judge or whatever. You could have called me out on my bullshit statement about bisexual high school guys. I get that what I said was hurtful. But it was like I shot you with a Nerf gun and you retaliated with a hunting knife to the heart.”

Blaine didn’t say anything. He seemed surprised by Kurt’s long-winded vent.

“Let me ask you something. When I first sat down and talked to you. You mentioned you had been bullied before. Tell me about that.”

“Um. Well, in 9th grade, I was attending a co-ed private school in Columbus, not far from my mom’s office. I rode into Columbus with my mom every day and she picked me up from the library across the street from the school each afternoon after work. In November, there was a Sadie Hawkins dance.”

Kurt looked confused.

“A Sadie Hawkins dance is where the girls ask the guys.”

“Okay.”

“So, I asked the only other gay guy I knew to go as friends. The dance went well enough. We didn’t slow dance or anything. We just hung out and danced to the faster songs. When the dance was over, we were standing outside waiting to be picked up. It got over a little earlier than we had thought, so we just stood outside. Most everyone was gone. Some upperclassmen decided to beat the crap out of us for coming to the dance as a ‘couple’. After that, we were both called names when the teachers weren’t around.”

“How badly were you injured?”

“Bruises, nothing broken. But we were really scared.”

“I know the feeling. Trust me. Go on about what happened at school.”
“Afterwards, some of the upperclassmen started calling us names when no one could hear them. We told a couple of teachers, but got the old ‘sticks and stones’ answer. You know, ‘shrug it off’ type of answer.”

Kurt nodded. “And?”

“And what?”

“And then what happened?”

“Oh, then my parents transferred me here for the second semester and my friend transferred to a different school in Columbus.”

“So, you got beat up once, got called names for a month, and your dad enrolled you here?”

“Yeah.”

“No wonder you don’t get it.” Kurt just shook his head. “That’s the very first question I should have asked you after you shared your brief answer that day we had coffee with Wes and David.”

“I’m lost.”

“No kidding.” Kurt rolled his eyes.

“Kurt?” Blaine looked confused.

“Swirlies, slushies, locker slams, backpacks to the face, hip checks in the hall, knocks to the back of the knees going down the stairs, dumpster tosses, being shoved into lockers, having pee balloons thrown at me, notes in my locker suggesting I kill myself or telling me I was going to hell. They nailed our lawn furniture to our roof. People called my house telling me that Lima didn’t need a fag like me around and I should kill myself.”

“What?”

“Those are all things that have happened to me. I mean the pee balloons and the furniture were one-time events. But everything else was constant. Not a single day of junior high or high school ever passed without at least ONE of those other things happening to me. Oftentimes, more than one of those things happened. I still have bruises, Blaine. They haven’t all healed and I’ve been here, what, four months?”

“I didn’t know.”

“You acted like you had been through something awful, which in reality, you have. I’m not downplaying the awfulness of being beaten up because that is horrible. But you made it seem like it was much more than a one-time event. Your advice to me was to confront Karofsky. I had let all of those things happen to me. I had never fought back. Finn blamed me. He told me I brought it upon myself by the way I dressed and acted. He didn’t want to stand up for me, which was fine since I wasn’t asking him to. I didn’t ask anyone to. I mean honestly, he and Puck had been part of the bullying before they joined Glee. I’m sure they both helped nail the furniture on our roof. And I know they were part of the pee balloons. So, I didn’t expect him to stand up for me. My dad didn’t know about most of it. I always answered the phone at home. I kept what was happening at school to myself. By not fighting back, I kept myself from being sent to the principal’s office and then having my dad notified that I had been fighting. So, standing up for myself wasn’t something I had ever actually tried. You kept sending me texts saying ‘courage’ and I steeled myself up and I went after Karofsky the next time he attacked me. I followed bad advice. My choice. I’m not blaming you for
what happened. Obviously, I still wanted to be your friend – and more. I didn’t hold your bad advice against you. I still don’t. It was my choice.”

Blaine just sat there for a few minutes. “People actually put notes in your locker suggesting that you kill yourself?”

“Yes.”

“You were stuffed in lockers?”

“In junior high. I was much smaller. I’ve grown 4 inches since sophomore year. In junior high, I was like 5 feet tall.”

“This went on for years?”

“Yes, Blaine. Years. And there’s every chance that once I leave this place, whether it’s at the end of this year or the end of next year, that I will be on the receiving end of the same type of treatment. There’s every chance that I will die in a gay bashing, even if I move to a big city like New York. There are homophobes everywhere. They believe that I will burn in hell. Some of them think the sooner I get there, the better. Some of them think that it’s a good thing to speed up the process. That was one of the things that made me look up to you so much when we met. You aren’t obvious. You can pass. But you were out and proud. When you said you might be bi, I just felt – I don’t even know a word for it. If you were bi and you dated Rachel, or any other girl, I was back to being alone. Bisexuals who have opposite gender partners appear to be straight. They blend in. It’s not stepping back into the closet like I said that day. But it has the same effect. They seem ‘normal’.”

“I can see your point on that.”

“Good. And as I said, I know bisexuality is real. I’m not going to out anyone, but I know one, maybe two bisexual people. I’m not sure whether the second one is a lesbian who dates guys to hide her true sexuality or whether she’s actually bisexual. Lima’s not a great place to be a lesbian either.”

“Not from what you’ve said.”

“We’ve gotten far, far off track.” Kurt had finished packing his bejeweling tools and pieces into their storage box. “I can’t sing ‘Candles’ with you. It’s a sure-to-make-us-lose choice. I’ve never seen any sad, slow songs performed at Sectionals or Regionals. Fun, dance songs are what we need. Now, ‘Misery’ doesn’t really fit the bill for uplifting because of the lyrics, but the song is very danceable and has a great beat.”

“If I choose a new song, will you sing with me?”

“I’m not sure. I guess it depends on the song. But, I honestly don’t think we should change the set list with Regionals in 9 days.”

“And the other issue…”

“No, I won’t go out with you, Blaine. I can’t. I have a boyfriend. And even if I didn’t, I have to have some self-respect. I’ve done a lot of thinking in the last month. You don’t even know the real me. I’m not who I am at Dalton. I did what you taught me. I became a Dalton boy. But it’s not who I am inside. You’ve come to like the Dalton boy I’m pretending to be every day that I’m here. But that’s not me. I wear bondage clothing. I wear top hats and knee-high boots. I wear kilts, skirts, and corsets, and I paint my toenails. I wear make up. I’m pretty sure that you don’t want to go out on dates with me in skin-tight white jeans, black knee-high bitch boots, and one of my many long sweaters. If we went out on dates, you would want me to wear slacks, a button up shirt, a sweater or
cardigan, dress shoes, and a suit jacket or pea coat. You would want me to dress like a typical Dalton boy would dress. Be honest.”

“I’ve never seen you in anything like you just described. Bondage clothes?”

“Lots of buckles, straps, mini locks.”

“Oh.”

“I’m conforming, like you told me to. You said my success here would depend on me understanding that we all wear blazers for a reason. I get that. Uniformity and conformity are the key to order and stability. I need the stability. I need the safety. So, I conformed.”

Kurt pulled out his phone.

“I’m going to show you something. Kurt pulled up “Bad Romance” and he handed the phone to Blaine.
Chapter 3

Kurt pressed the triangle to start the video. Blaine watched the whole thing.

“How did you even walk in those shoes, much less dance in them?”

“Practice. I didn’t just wear that outfit for the performance. I wore it all day long – to school – in all of my classes. I’m not a Dalton boy under this required uniform. I’m a freak, just like I said in that song. Here.” He reached for his phone. He pulled up “Toxic” and handed the phone back to Blaine.

“Oh, my God. You all did that in front of the whole school? Where was that version of you when we did ‘Animal’?”

“Confused. Packed in a ‘not at Dalton’ box? I’m not sure how to answer. I most certainly know how to act sexy. That whole thing with you – I had lost all of my self-confidence. You found Rachel more sexy than me. It was just a bad time. But I can guarantee you that when we get around to rehearsing ‘Animal’ this weekend that I can totally pull off sexy as you’ve clearly seen.”

“Um, yeah.”

“But I’m not who you want Blaine – not the real me. I may decide to keep the real me locked away and stay here to finish high school because the quality of teaching here is extraordinary compared to McKinley. I would definitely have an easier time in college if I stay here. I’d be much better prepared. I just have to find a way to let my real self out somewhere as well. I have to find some extracurricular activities outside the school if I stay.”

“So, ‘Animal’?”

“You need to play off the girls in the audience the way you did the day we performed for the Crawford County Day girls. I will do the same. We can’t play off of each other. We both have to come across as two straight guys flirting with girls. We need some of the Warblers standing between us when we’re singing and you can’t look at me.”

“Alright.”

“I think we should go with three of the songs we already have, if you want me to be honest. ‘Bills’, ‘Misery’, and ‘Animal’. But we’ll need to hold extra rehearsals. Probably all afternoon Saturday and Sunday. Our vocals on those songs are good, but our choreography is lame. After working on ‘Misery’ all last Sunday afternoon, it’s a lot better. If you really want to have a chance at winning, listen to me this time. I backed off after I was chastised when I spoke up last fall. I’ve gone along with everything and kept quiet for the most part. But the two of us singing ‘Candles’, and then you singing lead on ‘Raise Your Glass’ isn’t going to cut it. ‘Raise Your Glass’ could replace one of the other three, if it’s easier to choreograph.”

“Alright. Any other advice?”

“Can any one else do flips besides David? I saw him doing them during ‘Bills’ that one day in the practice room.”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, now’s a good time to find out. I would rather use this opportunity I’ve been given as ‘dual lead’ to kick our butts into shape to be a potential threat to New Directions. Call everyone to the gym
“tomorrow at 2:00. Make them come in gym clothes. Let’s see what they can actually do.”

“Seriously?”

“If you want a chance at winning. Otherwise, we can stick with the status quo and just give first place to the New Directions.”

Blaine pulled his phone out. Kurt’s phone pinged a few seconds later with the summons to the gym Saturday afternoon.

“Look, about all of that other stuff you said, I need to do some thinking.”

“That’s fine. You can think. Just don’t spend your time thinking about how to present your offer to me differently. That ship has sailed. We can potentially work to build a friendship based on mutual trust that’s balanced. But if you actually want to be friends with me, remember that this mirage of me that you see every day isn’t really me.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m still a bitchy, bossy, opinionated, freakish dressing, flaming teen gay guy. I fix cars. I know how to hunt. I know how to throw knives and ninja stars. I’m good with sai swords. I don’t fit any stereotype. Just because I never fought back, doesn’t mean I couldn’t. Yes, I read *Vogue*, paint my toenails, wear make up, and hold sleepovers for girls. I can also rebuild an engine, kick your ass in a fight, and I’m really good at video games, despite the fact that they aren’t my first choice of how to spend my free time. I may be an effeminate countertenor, but I can sing lower than you. How I choose to express myself doesn’t fit into neat little boxes. I once told Mr. Schue that there are more than four sides to me when he was shocked by my choice of singing a Mellencamp song.”

“I…”

“Yeah. That was pretty much everyone’s response. But if you want us to be friends, then it needs to be a two-way street. You’ve been less than forthcoming about personal information. I didn’t even know you were sophomore until Nick said you were when we were talking about classes recently. You presented yourself as this gay Yoda, someone older and wiser than me. I thought you were a senior when we first met. Then when I ended up in two classes with you, I thought you were a junior.”

“Oh.”

“How old are you? What are your parents’ names? What do they do? Do you have any siblings? When is your birthday? These are things that it would seem reasonable for me to know about someone if I were close friends with that person for the length of time we’ve known each other. I don’t need a mentor or a counselor. This school has a good one. I’ve been to seeing him weekly since I got here because it’s part of my enrollment requirements. He’s a good listener and gives good advice.”

“I’m 16. My birthday is in August. The rest we can talk about some time if you still want to.”

“We have some overlapping interests, like *Vogue*, musicals, and old movies. But we don’t really know anything about our non-intersecting interests, or anything beyond surface information. And as I’ve just proven, I don’t even know that much surface personal information about you.”

“Alright. I see your point.”

“And after this conversation, I promise not to talk 90% of the time when we talk, if you decide that
you want to see if we can be friends.”

“You have been quite talkative.”

“I’ve kept quiet for months. I had a lot to say.”

The final lunch bell rang.

“And I have a lot to think about. I’ll see you in the gym tomorrow afternoon.” Blaine got up and pushed the chair back up to the table.

Kurt took his canvas bag of supplies and his satchel and headed to class.

Blaine met with Thad, David, and Wes at dinner.

“Let Kurt run things when we meet tomorrow afternoon,” Blaine said bluntly.

“Why?” Wes asked.

“Because I want to win,” Blaine answered. “Or at least have a chance.”

“What do you mean?” David asked.

“Look, I met with Kurt at lunch and I told him what I had chosen for our duet and he shot me down. He refused to sing the song I suggested.”

“Well, then, you can just sing on your own,” Thad said.

“No. That’s not what needs to happen. We should have listened to him. The only reason we tied at Sectionals was because New Directions didn’t bring their ‘A’ game that day. He showed me a couple of videos from their private channel. Performances they didn’t even do for competitions. They are really good. If we go with the song I had thought of and ‘Raise Your Glass’, we’ll lose. We should have been working harder if we really wanted to win. We’ve been playing around. I think we have to decide whether we’re in this for fun or to win. We’ve got a little over a week.”

“What is he suggesting?”

“‘Bills’, ‘Animal’, and ‘Misery’. And better choreography.”

“We’ll have to hold extra rehearsals to learn more coordinated choreography,” Thad pointed out.

“I know, I think we need to give him a chance tomorrow. We shut him out when he got here. All I’ve done since he got here was tell him to conform. To fit in. To stop being himself. Oh, God, you should see the Lady Gaga video. The six girls in New Directions plus Kurt were dressed in Lady Gaga-esque costumes and they sang ‘Bad Romance’ with Kurt singing the lead alternating with two of the girls. He was in 10-inch heels, dancing in a dress and a white wig. And they did that for FUN.”

“Fine,” Wes said. “We’ll listen tomorrow. We’ll be part of the team, not the council to dictate what happens. But there will be a full group vote to change anything about what we’ve already approved.”

“That’s perfectly reasonable,” Blaine said.
Kurt changed quickly and grabbed everything he needed and headed to Lima. He worked two hours at the shop and headed home as he had been told to do. He sat down at the table while everyone else was finishing up and talked with everyone, but he didn’t eat because he had plans to eat with Sam.

Sam. He was so excited.

“So, once we finish eating and clean up, Finn is heading to Artie’s for the night. Burt and I are going out to the movies and dessert somewhere. We’ll be back around 11:30.”

“That sounds fun,” Kurt said.

“Yeah, Mike and Puck are coming too. We’re going to kick some butt at Halo and COD. Artie’s hooked up more than one TV. It’s gonna be great. Sam said he couldn’t come. He doesn’t come to anything anymore. He always says he’s gotta work or do homework.”

“Well, some of us work, Finn,” Kurt said sarcastically.

“Yeah, I know. I need to get a job again. I hated working at Sheets and Things, though.”

“I can imagine. Folding isn’t exactly your strong suit.”

“Be nice,” Burt said.

“That was nice. Have you seen what a fitted sheet looks like after he’s folded it?”

Carole laughed.

“Alright, fine,” Burt said. “But looking for a job would be a good idea, Finn. If you want to learn to work at the shop, I can teach you what you’d need to know to help out in the afternoons after school.”

“I’ll think about it.”

Eventually they all finished and Kurt and Finn did the dishes. Kurt was still in the kitchen when he heard Finn slam the door as he headed out. He had pulled out the ingredients to make banana bread. He had found a no-flour, no-sugar recipe for it online and decided to give it a shot since he knew that Sam watched his carb intake, but loved treats. He mixed everything up and got the batter in the oven. He cleaned up all the bowls he had used and wiped everything down. He ran up to change clothes. He pulled the bread out to cool. Looks good. I hope it tastes good and Sam likes it.

He left in time to pull up to Sam’s at 8:30. Butterflies.

Sam came out right after he pulled up. He opened the back door and tossed his duffle into the backseat and shut the door back. He opened the passenger door and got in. He leaned over and kissed Kurt’s cheek quickly before he even got his door all the way shut. Once it was closed, he scooted over and reached out and turned Kurt’s face gently and kissed him on the lips.

Oh, God. “Ready?”

“Definitely. I like your outfit. Much more you than the sweats you had on Sunday evening.”

Sam likes the real me. “It was the sweats or the actual uniform. We aren’t allowed to wander around the building in regular clothing. We can wear it on the way out or in, but once we’re in, we have to follow the dress code.”
It only took a few minutes to get back to the Hummel’s.

“You’ve been here plenty of times, but not upstairs.” When they got to the top, Kurt said, “Down that way is Finn’s room. My room is this way.”

Sam followed him.

“You can put your duffle on the dresser if you want. If anything needs hung up, you can put it in my closet.”

Sam pulled his uniform shirts out. “Probably just these. Showing up with them all wrinkled probably wouldn’t look good.”

“There’s extra hangers in there. Just grab two and hang your shirts up.”

Sam’s in my room. In my closet.

“There’s a bunch of cool stuff in there I’ve never seen you wear,” Sam said as he came out of the closet.

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Maybe I’ll do a fashion show for you sometime.”

Sam wiggled his eyebrows. “That sounds like fun.” He moved so that he was standing in front of Kurt. He put his hands on his waist and stepped closer.

Kissing. Kurt closed the gap and pressed his lips to Sam’s. He put his hands on Sam’s shoulders and slid them down his biceps and licked at Sam’s lower lip. Sam responded by opening his lips slightly and licking back. After a couple of minutes, they broke for air. “Let’s go downstairs and eat and watch the movie before my parents get back. We can come back up here afterwards.” He stepped back and took Sam’s hand and led him down to the kitchen.

Kurt made plates of food for both of them. They sat at the table and ate. They kept looking at each other and smiling and causing the other to giggle or laugh.

This is fun.

Kurt opened the dishwasher and they loaded it with their dinner dishes. He turned it on to run. He turned around and Sam was right behind him, kissing him almost instantly.

“You are a much better kisser than Quinn.”

“You’re a better kisser than Brittany.”

They both laughed.

“I made you something before I came to get you.”

“I smelled banana bread when I came in. Is it for me?”

“It is. It’s made with no flour and no sugar. To lower its guilt content.”
Sam laughed so hard he about choked. He kissed Kurt. “You are a lot of fun. I knew it. Everyone thinks you’re so stuffy and prim and proper. They’re so mistaken. You are – they just don’t get it. You keep most of your fabulousness hidden under your awesome clothes. They aren’t ready for the full Kurt Hummel are they?”

“Not at all.” He kissed Sam. “How about you?”

“Oh, I don’t know, but I’m definitely going to give it my all.”

“We’ll see what you think after the fashion show. Did you bring the movie down?”

“It’s upstairs. I’ll go get it.”

“I’ll slice the bread.” Kurt cut two slices and put them on a napkin. He sliced the rest and put it in a storage container for later.

Sam was back in a flash and they headed down to the family room. He handed Kurt the movie and took the banana bread. Kurt loaded it into the DVD player and grabbed the remote. He turned the lights off and sat down next to Sam.

They each took a slice of the bread and took a bite.

Sam gobbled his down in about four bites.

“You must like it,” Kurt said with half his slice still in his hand.

“It’s awesome.”

_He likes it._

“It would be awesome for breakfast with Greek yogurt.”

“That can be arranged. We’ll have it Sunday morning for breakfast.” Kurt finished his piece and put the plate on the end table. He sat back in the center of the couch. “Ready?”

“Nope. You’re too far away. Scoot closer.”

Kurt scooted over.

“Closer.”

“I can’t get any closer.”

“Hmm. Stand up.” Sam grabbed the throw off the back of the couch and moved the coffee table closer. He put the throw on top of it. He sat back down in the corner of the couch and extended his left leg along the back of the couch and put his right leg on across the coffee table and patted the space in front of him.

Kurt sat down where Sam indicated and matched the way Sam was sitting. He leaned back against Sam’s chest when Sam wrapped his arms around him and pulled him back. “Better?”

“Much. As long as you’re comfortable.”

“We’ll try it. I’ve never snuggled up to anyone before.” Kurt started the movie, which was _Avatar_. He knew this was a test, of sorts. He had never seen it before and he knew it was one of Sam’s favorite movies. He planned to watch carefully and critically so he could have a good conversation
about it with Sam. He wanted to give Sam’s ideas a chance. Sam was taking a huge risk to date a guy and come out at some point. *I can learn to like sci fi movies.*

When the credits began to play, Kurt turned and put both of his legs up on the couch, making him sit at a 90-degree angle to Sam. “I liked it. The visual effects are amazing. But the whole thing is kind of like *The Matrix* … or me,” he added quietly.

“What do you mean?”

“Me, being at Dalton. I’m kind of like Sully. It’s like this anthropologic study of another race of humans – humans who have these rules that I didn’t know. People who live their whole lives making all of their choices based on achieving an outcome they had no input into. I feel like I put the uniform on like Sully gets in the machine. And some days I feel like I’ve lost myself. I’ll stop. It’s not all about me. The movie just hit closer to home than I expected it to. There’s a lot going on. I’m sure I’ll catch more of it each time I see it.”

Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt and pulled him close. “They’re the Borg, aren’t they?”

Kurt laughed really loud. “You know, I have heard you calling them that in my mind before. Honestly.”

Sam laughed. “Don’t let them change you. Do what you have to do to survive, but don’t let them change who you are.” He turned Kurt’s face toward him enough to kiss him gently. “You’re awesome just the way you are.”

“Thanks.” Kurt leaned toward Sam and put his head on Sam’s shoulder. *He called me “awesome.”*

Sam tightened his grip on Kurt and hugged him.

“Let’s grab the movie and straighten things back up and go upstairs. It’s 11:30.” He leaned forward and kissed Sam gently, turned to put his feet back on the floor, and stood up. Sam pulled his leg off the table and pushed it back. Kurt put the throw back and ejected the DVD and handed it to Sam.

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“So…” Sam said once they were in Kurt’s room.

“Well, I shower before I go to bed. So, I figured we’d shower, put on our pajamas, and get in bed.”

“Together?”

“Unless you want to sleep on the floor.”

“No. I’m still just sort of surprised that your dad is okay with this.”

“Me too. The family rules were updated just a week ago. So, do you want to shower first or second?”

“Well, I grabbed a lot of stuff, but in my rush, I forgot to go in the bathroom.”

“You can use my stuff. Or if you want something more ‘manly’, you can go grab Finn’s shampoo in his bathroom.”

“Yours is fine, I’m sure. You always smell good.”

Kurt blushed. *He likes how I smell?* “Okay. Follow me.” Kurt led him to the bathroom. “There’s a
clean towel for you here. You can hang it on the hook on the back of the door. Washcloths are under
the sink. Everything else is in the shower. Oh, and I even have a brand new toothbrush in the cabinet
that I hadn’t opened yet. You can have it.” He turned around and Sam pulled him into a hug.

Kurt ran his hands through the back of Sam’s hair. “Your hair’s getting shaggy. Are you letting it
grow out?”

“Nope. Just no money or time to go get it cut.”

“I can do it if you want.”

“Seriously?”

“Sure. I’ve trimmed the girls’ hair lots of times. I did the stripes in Tina’s hair.”

“Alright. I’m getting pretty tired of it in my eyes.”

“Umm. Sit on the toilet facing the wall and I’ll get the stuff out,” Kurt said as he reached under the
sink and pulled out a box.

Sam sat down and Kurt put a cape on him. He spritzed Sam’s hair with water. He pulled out a comb
and haircutting scissors and trimmed Sam’s hair up neatly. Fifteen minutes later, Kurt took the cape
off and said, “Take a look and let me know if I should do anything else.”

Sam stood up and looked in the bathroom mirror. Kurt had cut it so it looked like it did back at
Sectionals. “It looks great. Is there anything you can’t do?” He ran his thumb down Kurt’s cheek.

“There’s plenty. Let me take the cape down and shake it out and grab a broom. You can go ahead
and get in the shower.”

Sam followed him out to grab his pajamas and headed back to the bathroom. When Kurt came back
up, he knocked on the bathroom door and opened it slightly.

“Is it okay if I sweep while you’re in the shower?”

“Sure.”

Kurt swept and wiped up the hair and put all of the haircutting tools back away and left the room.
Sam came out a few minutes later in his pajamas.

“Your turn.”

Kurt already had his pajamas in his hand and went in the bathroom. When he came back out, Sam
was looking through his movie collection.

“We can watch one of those tomorrow night if you want. We can take it with us and watch it on my
laptop.”

“You can pick. I chose tonight’s movie.”

“I’ll think about it.” Kurt walked around the bed and put his clothes in the laundry basket in his
closet. “Ready to get in bed?”

“Sure. Which side do you want?”

“I’m not sure. I’ve never slept in the same bed with anyone. Just get in. We can always switch.” Kurt
waited for Sam to lie down and he turned the lamp off on the dresser, leaving just a small nightlight under his vanity as the only light source. “If it’s too dark, I can turn the light in the bathroom on and shut the door most of the way.”

“Nah. It’s fine.”

“I usually play some soft music. Will that bother you?”

“Nope, not at all.”

Kurt pressed play on his iPod that was docked on the speakers on his bookcase. “Are you always this easy to get along with?”

“Um. Is that a trick question?”

“No. I just want to make sure that you’re actually being honest with me and not just going along with whatever I say.” Kurt lay down in the bed on his back and pulled the covers up.

“Oh. I’m being honest. I’m not the type to lie about things, but I guess I do tend to just go along with the flow. I have a little brother and sister and I learned a long time ago that peace and harmony are worth a lot more than getting my own way sometimes. But if something actually bothers me, I won’t be all passive-aggressive about it. I’ll say something.”

“Good. I know I’m bossy and I’m sure people call me a bitch, but just like you said that your family situation taught you to be a peacemaker of sorts, mine taught me to take charge. You may not know, but my mom died when I was 8. I had to learn to take care of myself. And when you’ve done it from such a young age, it’s hard to let someone else do it. But if I ever get to be too much, just tell me, okay?”

“Okay. Can I hold you?”

*He wants to snuggle more! “How?”*

“Turn on your side facing away from me.”

“That seems like the wrong direction.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because I can’t kiss you facing that way.”

Sam laughed. “Scoot this way then. I thought you wanted to go to sleep.”

“It’s an internal struggle. Kissing is winning right now.”

“Is that so?” Sam scooted forward and kissed him.

“Mmm. It is. No wonder all the guys at McKinley are always trying to get their girlfriends to make out with them somewhere. I never knew kissing could be so much fun.”

“Me neither.” Sam licked his way into Kurt’s mouth.

Kurt moaned. He parted his lips and let Sam explore. *Oh, God. This is amazing.*

Sam pulled back to catch his breath. “I’m going to need a lot of cold showers.”
“Why?”
“To keep from, well, you know.”
“Can I feel?” Kurt paused. “With your clothes on, but can I?”
“Okay.”
“You’re sure?”
“Yeah.”
Kurt moved his hand down. Oh, wow. He’s super turned on – I did that. He giggled.
“What’s so funny?”
“It’s not funny. It’s amazing. I’ve been called the most awful things my whole life. But this, this is amazing. You really do find me attractive.”
“Of course, I really like you. And you’re gorgeous. Whoever said otherwise is just stupid and wanted to make you feel bad about yourself and lied.”
Kurt kissed him passionately. When they broke for air again, he ran his thumb down Sam’s cheek.
“You’re a sweet talker.”
“I’m telling you the truth. You could absolutely be a model. Those losers just wanted to knock you down and make you lose your confidence.” He pulled him back into the passionate kissing. He pulled away for air and started kissing down Kurt’s neck.
“Oh, God.”
“You like that?”
“Uh huh.”
He kept it up.
“No hickeys that can be seen.”
“Got it.” He slipped the loose t-shirt down Kurt’s shoulder a bit and started nipping at the skin there.
Kurt was moaning. He barely managed to say, “You have to stop.”
Sam froze and pulled back. “Did I hurt you?”
“No, not at all.” He worked to catch his breath. “Just slow down a bit. It’s kind of overwhelming. It’s amazing.”
Sam laughed. He gave him a peck on the lips. “It is amazing.”
“We need to calm down and try to sleep. I’m a pretty early riser and no amount of staying up late keeps me asleep past 7 or 8. And we both have to drive to Westerville tomorrow.” He kissed Sam gently. “I’ll turn over like you suggested and we can snuggle however you want.” Kurt turned over.
Sam adjusted himself as best he could and scooted up behind Kurt. He slipped his left arm under Kurt’s pillow and slid his right arm under Kurt’s right arm and pulled Kurt back against his chest and
bent his knees up to fit in the space behind Kurt’s legs.

Kurt moved his arm a bit until he could get his hand under Sam’s and Sam interlocked their fingers.

“Okay?” Sam asked.

“Perfect.”

Kurt woke up at 7:00, still cuddled up in Sam’s embrace.

_So, not a dream. I have a sexy adorable jock boyfriend who likes to cuddle. This is better than any dream._

Sam wiggled a bit, pulling Kurt closer like a teddy bear.

Kurt giggled.

“Mmm.” Sam kissed the back of his neck. “Giggles and cuddles in the morning. I like it.”

Kurt giggled more. “Did you sleep okay?”

“Fabulous. You are a most excellent teddy bear. Very cozy.” He kissed Kurt’s shoulder.

“Well, Mister Cuddles are you hungry? I’ll make us breakfast.”

“More cuddles first.”

Kurt giggled again. “You’re adorable.”

“Mmm.”

Kurt pulled Sam’s hand up to his mouth, kissed his palm, and then licked it.

Sam startled a bit.

Kurt laughed. “Sam, sweetie, we’re supposed to be waking up.”

“Well, licking me will wake one part up for sure. Wow.”

“I’ll file that away for future use,” Kurt teased.

He squirmed a bit and turned over and faced Sam, whose eyes were still closed. He kissed his forehead, his eyelids, his cheeks, and then Sam grabbed him and flipped him on his back and kissed him.

Kurt squeaked. Sam laughed and pressed in to kiss him again. Kurt rearranged a bit and flipped them. He wasn’t about to let Sam think he could keep the upper hand for long. He started to tickle Sam.

“You ARE fun.” Sam said between cackling. “I’m awake. I’m awake.”

Kurt pressed down and slipped down and lay on top of Sam and kissed him.

“If you keep this up, we’re going to reach the point of no return very quickly,” Sam said.
“Do you want me to move off of you?”

“Not really, but I want you to have a say as well.”

“I’m good, if you are.”

Sam reconnected their lips and wrapped his arms around Kurt.

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“Oh, wow,” Kurt was still out of breath and kissing down Sam’s neck. “I had no idea.”

“Me neither.” Sam gently tipped Kurt’s face up and kissed him. “So gay. Kissing girls is lame. No more of that.”

Kurt laughed. “Well, no need for girls. You have me now,” he said with feigned haughtiness and a side of silliness.

“And I’ve decided to keep you as long as you’ll have me.”

Kurt blushed. “You are a sweet talker. I agree to your terms. I’ll let you keep me.”

“Best deal ever.” Sam kissed him again. “We are going to need another shower. And I didn’t bring enough clothes for this particular circumstance.”

Kurt laughed. “Well, we have a shower, obviously. And a washing machine. I’m sure my underwear will fit you because I’m pretty sure we wear the same size clothes or close to it. You’re only like an inch taller than me.”

“So, shower and laundry?”

“Shower, laundry, and breakfast while the laundry is in the washer.”

“Deal. Who showers first?” Sam asked.

“Well…”

“Well, what?”

“We could shower together.”

“You’d be okay with that?”

“Surprisingly, yes. But only if you want to.”

“You’re kidding right? Of course I want to.”

“Alright. I’m going to grab us some underwear. Come pick what you like.”

“You’re really going to let me wear your clothes?”

“Sure.” Kurt got out of bed, went around to the dresser, and opened the drawer he kept his underwear in.

Sam came up behind him and wrapped his arms around him. “You know I could just wear the pair I packed for tomorrow while I wash the ones I have on.”
“You could – or you could wear a pair of mine.”

Kurt stepped to the side and Sam looked down.

“Ooh, I like those red ones.”

“I bet they’d look good on you too. Grab them and let’s go shower.”

Sam picked them up, pushed the drawer shut, and followed Kurt to the bathroom.

Kurt had already stripped, stepped into the shower, and turned the water on.

“You’re sure you’re okay with this.”

Kurt flipped the lever to turn the showerhead on. “I’m sure.” *Better to be rejected now than later.*

Sam undressed, put his pajamas in the pile with Kurt’s, grabbed another washcloth, and got in the shower.

Kurt was facing the water when Sam got in. “I’m not a prudish boy who wants to be a girl just because I like to wear skirts sometimes. I’m just as much a horny teenage boy as the rest of the guys our age. I’ve just never had anyone like me back.”

“I never thought you wanted to be a girl. I don’t think I’ve seen the skirts though. You’ll have to show me during the fashion show.”

*He wants to see me in a skirt? “Maybe next Saturday after Regionals.”*

“Ooh, something else to look forward to. Is this a shower where we each wash ourselves and keep our hands to ourselves?”

*He wants to touch me. *HE wants to touch ME!* “Doesn’t have to be.”

“So, I can touch you?”

*YES!!! “Sure.”*

Sam grabbed the washcloth Kurt had brought in for himself and lathered it up and started to wash Kurt’s back and shoulders. “You’re sure.”

*Please, let this not blow up in my face. “I’m sure.”*

“What are these bruises from? No one at Dalton is hurting you are they?” Sam continued washing down Kurt’s back, his butt, his legs.

“No. Those are still left from McKinley, from the locker slams.”

“This one along your side is still pretty obvious.”

“Oh, that was from one of the last times Karofsky shoved me hard enough that I fell. My locker was open at the time and I was standing sideways. I figured it probably fractured a couple of my ribs. I looked it up and they don’t recommend wrapping fractured ribs anymore, so I didn’t bother going to the doctor. It doesn’t hurt anymore.”

“I hate him.” Sam ran his hands down Kurt’s arms gently. “Turn and rinse?”
Kurt balked a little. “You won’t tease me will you?” *Oh, God.*

“Absolutely not. Why would I tease you?”

“Well, no one’s ever seen me with my clothes off, ever. Well, not in my working memory.”

“Oh. Well, I’m honored to be the first and I won’t tease you. I promise.”

*Time’s up.* Kurt turned around and rinsed the shampoo out of his hair and the soap off his backside.

“You’re gorgeous. Really.”

*He’s not rejecting me.* “Oh. I’ve been teased my entire life about having a tiny dick or none at all. I’ve always been self-conscious. People have always acted like my high voice meant I wasn’t big enough to be a real man.”

“Um, truth? You’re bigger than most of the guys on the football team.”

Really? “Oh.”

Sam offered Kurt’s washcloth back to him.

“You changed your mind?”

“I didn’t want to presume.”

*He’s such a sweetie.* “It’s fine.”

Sam washed Kurt’s chest gently, which turned Kurt on even more. Kurt put his hand around Sam’s and helped him since he seemed unsure still.

“Where’s your washcloth? I want to wash you too, if it’s okay.” After he asked, he noticed it laying over the shower door frame. He reached up and grabbed it and soaped it up. “Turn around.” *I’m touching Sam without his clothes on. I’m hallucinating. I have a raging fever and I’m hallucinating.*

“Kurt?”

He blinked. “Sorry. Zoned out. This is better than any erotic dream I have ever had.”

Sam laughed. “Is that so?”

“Definitely. I’ve never been good at that type of thing. I always wanted it to be with someone who liked me, so I could never get very far with my imagination.”

Sam turned back around. “Well, I definitely like you and you’re not hallucinating.” He kissed him gently. “Do my front?”

Kurt nodded. But he looked sort of frightened. *This is real. I’m actually going to touch a boy.*

“Kurt, look at me.”

Kurt looked up.

“Please continue.” Sam genuinely smiled at Kurt.

He nodded. And went back to carefully washing Sam. *He wants me to do this. He likes it.*
Sam leaned in and whispered in his ear. “A little soap makes an excellent shower lubricant.”

Kurt blushed.

“You’ve never?”

He shook his head.

“How about I do you and you do me?”

Kurt nodded.

Kurt was caught up in touching and being touched and kissing interspersed with Sam’s words. “Gorgeous.” “Amazing.” “Beautiful.”

They were both already so worked up, it didn’t take long before they fell over the edge one right after the other.

*This is the most amazing feeling in the world.*

Sam reached up and took the shower hose down and rinsed them off and then sprayed his back off. “Do you need rinsed off anywhere else?”

Kurt shook his head, so awestruck and amazed that he was speechless.

Sam put the sprayer up and reached around Kurt and turned the water off. He reached out the shower and grabbed Kurt’s towel and wrapped it around him and kissed him quickly and stepped out of the shower to grab his towel off the back of the door.

Kurt tucked the towel end so it would stay on, stepped out of the shower towards Sam and put his hands on the sides of his face and kissed him. He stepped back so they could both dry.

Sam hung his towel back up on the hook and grabbed the short red boxer briefs and put them on. “What do you think?”

Kurt blushed and smiled. “They look good on you.” *Hot, totally hot.*

“They’re soft. I like them.” He waggled his tush.

Kurt hung his towel back on the rack and put on the black pair of long boxer briefs that he had grabbed for himself.

“Ooh. I like those too. They look hot on you.”

Kurt waggled his tush like Sam had.

Sam wolf whistled.

*Better than any daydream. I have a boyfriend that thinks I’m sexy.*

Kurt stepped out of the bathroom giving Sam room to brush his teeth or whatever else he needed to do. He sat down right outside the door on his vanity stool and put his moisturizer on. When Sam came out, Kurt slipped in and brushed his teeth.

Sam was in Kurt’s closet looking through his clothes when Kurt came out of the bathroom. “Can I pick?”
“Sure. I may not wear whatever it is back to Dalton, but I’ll wear it until we leave.”

Sam pulled out a utility kilt and handed it to Kurt.

Kurt put it on.

“Hot. Very hot. You have nice legs.”

“I usually wear black leggings and knee-high boots with this.”

“Nah. I like seeing your legs.” He stepped back into the closet to look through the clothes again. “Hmm.” He pulled out a black and white button-up with a small skull print on it.

*Nice choice.* Kurt took it and put it on and tucked it in.

“Nice. I like it.”

Kurt cuffed the sleeves halfway up his forearms. “Get dressed so we can go make breakfast. I’m supposed to be helping you get caught up on schoolwork too.”

Sam pulled out a pair of jeans and a pine green Henley out of his duffle and put them on.

Kurt thought it completely unfair that Sam looked absolutely totally sexy in the simplest of clothes. “Very nice.” He winked at Sam. “Let’s go downstairs.”

Carole was in the kitchen when they got downstairs.

“Good morning, boys.”

“Good morning,” they answered back.

“There’s some coffee already made. I can make you something to eat, if you’d like.”

“You don’t have to cook for us, Carole.”

“I know, honey, but I only get to mother you boys for a little while longer.”

Kurt laughed. “At least let us help.”

“Alright.”

“How do you like your eggs, Sam?”

“Cooked, please?”

Carole laughed. “Any special way?”

“I’ll eat them any way you cook them. Thanks.”

Kurt pulled strawberries and blueberries out of the fridge. He grabbed a cutting board, a strainer, and a knife and put them on the counter in front of Sam along with the fruit. He grabbed two bananas out of the fruit bowl and handed them to him. “Oranges too?”

“Nah, this is good.”
Kurt put an apron over his head and tied it behind his back.

Sam laughed and started to cut the tops off the strawberries and put them in the strainer. He cleaned them all and started to cut them into pieces and put them in the bowl down Kurt had put next to the strainer. He kept working on the fruit salad.

Kurt put an apron on as well, and then pulled out some precooked turkey sausages and started warming them up in a skillet while Sam was working on the fruit.

Carole whipped the eggs, added a little milk, and scrambled them after the oil in the pan had heated up.

It didn’t take long for Burt to make his way out to the kitchen once the smell of sausages started wafting through the house.

He went out to the front porch and grabbed the paper. He brought it back in, sat down at the dining room table, and started to read it. Carole plated all of the eggs and sausages while Kurt poured Burt a cup of coffee.

Kurt pulled down four small bowls for Sam to put the fruit salad in. He turned and grabbed a small bowl from the fridge and used a spoon to dollop a bit of homemade whipped cream on the top of the fruit salad. He put the small bowls on the plates and Carole carried two and Kurt grabbed the other two.

“Help yourself to some coffee or milk or whatever you want to drink,” Kurt said to Sam. He put the plates down and came back to make himself a cup of coffee. He slipped his apron off and put it back on the hook on the side of the fridge. He saw Sam standing motionless. “Need a glass?”

He nodded.

“Left hand cabinet.”

Sam put his apron where he saw Kurt put his. He opened the cabinet to the left of the sink and pulled out a glass and filled it with water and went into the dining room and sat down.

“Good morning, Sam.”

“Good morning, Mr. Hummel.”

“Call me Burt, son.”

“Yes, sir.”

Burt laughed.

“Thanks for breakfast, Mrs. Hummel.”

“You’re welcome, Sam, but please call me Carole.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Burt laughed again. “Those southern manners are engrained deep, aren’t they?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, I don’t suppose it will be easy to break you of it, so I’ll just go with it for now. But you don’t
need to call us ‘sir’ and ‘ma’am’.”

“I’ll try, but I can’t make any promises. It just comes out.” Sam focused on not adding “sir”.

“I’m sure.” Burt just laughed again. “I bet you got in trouble in school for not saying it.”

“Yes, sir, we did. Thank you for helping my dad get that other part-time job. He thinks we might be able to scrape up enough to prevent the foreclosure. We’re going to list the house for sale, if we can prevent the foreclosure. So, maybe it will sell during the first month and the whole situation will be taken care of.”

“Where will you move?” Kurt asked.

“I don’t know. My dad just said it’s really important to sell rather than let it be foreclosed on. He said they put a really big down payment on the house. So, if we can sell it, we can recoup the down payment, or at least most of it.”

“I’m going to talk to him again. Depending on how much he needs, I might be able to loan him whatever you all can’t come up with so that he can sell rather than lose the house in foreclosure. He can pay me back later, when the house sells. I know grown men can be stubborn about the idea of charity, but people need friends when times get tough. It also seems really fast to me. After breakfast, I’m going to call Hiram.”

Sam looked confused.

“One of Rachel’s dads is a lawyer,” Kurt said.

“Oh.”

Burt continued, “I won’t name names. I’m just going to ask him some basic questions. If his answers indicate that the bank is being unreasonable, then I’ll see if your dad is willing to meet with him.”

“Sounds good, sir.”

Burt laughed.

“I’m sorry, Sam. Way back when I was in high school, we had this one teacher, Mr. Larson, who has to be the weirdest person I have ever met in my entire life. And he insisted on calling all of the students in our class ‘Miss This’ or ‘Mister That’ and if we didn’t call him ‘sir’ every time we spoke, he’d pause and refuse to answer us if we didn’t. So, he’d say something like, ‘What’s the capital of Illinois, Mr. Hummel?’ and I’d answer, ‘Springfield.’ And he’d stand there like I hadn’t answered until I would correct myself and say, ‘Springfield, sir.’ And we had to stand up when we had been called on. If we forgot the ‘sir’, we had to sit down and stand up again before we answered it with the ‘sir’ at the end. And he always had the most ridiculous look on his face when he did this to all of us. It wasted so much classroom time and he got made fun of a lot by the students. So, every time you say it to me, his ridiculous expression flashes back in my mind and watching the students sit down and stand up. It was like a room full of jack-in-the-boxes.”

“All of my teachers were like that, well not the standing up part. And if requests were not followed by ‘please’, the answer was ‘no’ automatically. We’d have to make the request again, followed by ‘please’. So, you can imagine how quickly little kids learn to add ‘please’ to everything. I will do my best to call you by your first names because you asked, but I am seriously not sure that I can stop with the ‘sir’, ‘ma’am’ and the ‘please’ and ‘thank you’.”

“It’s alright as long as you can handle me laughing sometimes.”
“It’s fine… Burt.”

By this point, everyone had finished eating. Sam and Kurt cleared the table and loaded the dishwasher. Carole told them to leave the pans.

“If you need us, we’ll be upstairs working on homework.”

They got back upstairs and Kurt realized that they had forgotten to take the laundry down with them.

“Go ahead and get out what you need to work on and I’ll be right back up. Kurt grabbed the pajamas from the bathroom and tossed them in the basket and headed back downstairs. He could hear his dad and Carole talking.

“I like him, Burt.”

“Me too. Did you see what Kurt had on?”

“The kilt or skirt or whatever it was?”

“Yeah. I haven’t seen him in anything like that since well, a long while, like 6 months ago. If he feels comfortable enough to go back to dressing like himself with Sam around, I like him too. He’s a hard worker. He’s working full time to save his family from losing their house.”

Kurt quit eavesdropping and got the clothes into the washer and started it. He left the basket in the laundry room and came out and nearly walked into Burt.

“Sorry, Dad.”

“Come in the living room for a minute.”

Kurt followed him and sat down on the couch.

Burt sat down. “I want to apologize.”

“For what?”

“For telling you to leave Sam alone last fall.”

“Oh.”

“I’ve realized that Finn exaggerated about quite a few things. Carole knows he did too now. And I never did listen to your side of the story.”

“Well, I know more details now than I did then. Sam came to Glee and joined. I thought he was cute. He liked me, which I didn’t know at the time. I approached him to sing a duet with me in class like I told you. Finn pressured me not to sing with Sam. Finn pressured Sam. You pressured me. I went to Sam and broke off the duet. He thought that I had figured out that he liked me, but I didn’t like him back and that I was cutting him loose with the ‘it’s not you, it’s me’ speech to let him down easy. As I said, I was NOT aware that he liked me and I broke the duet off because Finn said I was painting a target on Sam’s back and you know that I would never willingly subject someone to what people have done to me. So, he performed with Quinn. I performed by myself.”

“But then he and Quinn dated.”
“Yeah. He had never dated anyone before. He knew he liked boys, but everyone was pushing him toward Quinn this fall – Rachel most of all. I’m sure she did not do it out of the purity of her heart. If Quinn was busy with Sam, then Rachel would have an easier time keeping her claws hooked in Finn. And it worked until she screwed it up herself and Finn broke up with her. Then as I told you, Finn and Quinn got together again while Quinn was still with Sam. Sam was a convenient boyfriend for Quinn. He’s cute and he made quarterback. Her dating the quarterback brought her back up to the top of the social ladder at McKinley. Sam was trying to fit in at a new school and he thought I didn’t like him that way. And Finn and Rachel pushed him toward Quinn and she was willing. There was never any passion on either side, according to Sam. He was faithful to her, but there was no spark. He had never dated anyone, he didn’t really know what to expect, but he gave it his best shot.”

“And now?”

“He’s not going to date any more girls.”

“I see.”

“Dad, it’s really hard to be gay in high school. I don’t blame him for seeing if he could make it work with a girl. I even tried and I never had the smallest indication that I might like girls. You teased him about not being able to drop the ‘sir’. The indoctrination that boys date girls can be very deep, even deep enough to make gay boys think they could be bi.”

“You got upset with Blaine over his claim that he might be bi.”

“That was different. I was mad at him about a lot more things than that and they all just sort of got lumped together at that point. A lot of it was the ‘Rachel’ of it. She KNEW I liked Blaine and she asked him out on a date. And I apologized to Blaine the very next day about what I said about bisexual teen boys. Gay, bi, straight, whatever other terms there may be – I’m all for people being whoever they are. And I would still date Sam if he were bi. He likes me and I like him. That’s what matters to me.”

“Alright. So, I’ll let you get back upstairs and we’ll talk more another time. I’m going to go call Hiram and Dwight and see what we can all figure out.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

“Sorry. My dad stopped me to tell me something.”

“That’s okay. I was reading my history assignment. I went to my teachers like you said. All of them are giving me a chance to turn in my missing assignments for partial credit.”

“Excellent. How about if I read the history book to you. Will that help?”

“Immensely. I read so slow that it takes forever to get through the assignments.”

Kurt sat down on the bed and took the book. “From what page to what page?”

Sam showed him the assignment. Kurt read all of the pages to him.

“What next?”

“I have to answer all of those questions.” He pointed to a worksheet.
“Do you have to do it by hand? Or can I use my laptop and type out the answers?”

“Yeah. I just don’t have a laptop to use.”

“Oh, okay.”

“I sold it to buy groceries back before my dad got the job at McDonald’s and I got the extra job delivering pizzas.”

“Well, we can use mine. I’ll type out your answers. It will go a lot faster I think.”

They worked as a team and finished quickly.

“Let’s focus on your written assignments like that one – ones that I can type quickly and we can get a bunch of them over with and you can turn them in on Monday. We’ll print all of them before we leave to pick up your truck and head to Westerville.”

Sam leaned toward him and Kurt met him and they kissed. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll do anything I can to help you not have to repeat this semester. Did you pass the OGTs last semester?”

“Some of them. I have to retake the ones I didn’t pass this summer.”

“I know you have dyslexia. Do you have an official written diagnosis somewhere?”

“My mom does, I’m sure. Why?”

“I’m going to ask the advocate that’s helping me with something about whether she can help you.”

“I don’t know what that means, but alright.”

“I don’t know if she can help, but it’s worth asking. Now, let’s get as many of these done quickly as we can. You look through your pile and put all of the ones you can do quickly with me helping in a stack. I’m going to go move the clothes to the dryer.”

Kurt was gone and back as quickly as possible. They blasted through as many of Sam’s backlogged assignments as they could. Kurt finished up the laundry. They repacked their clothes and Kurt changed. Kurt printed out all of the completed assignments and gave Sam one of his empty binders to put them in. Kurt packed food for Sam to eat while he was out delivering pizzas and grabbed the banana bread. They packed everything in the Navigator and headed out a little before noon to pick up Sam’s truck.

“I’ll take all of your stuff up to my room. Text me when you pull into the visitor lot and I’ll come down and meet you tonight.” He leaned over the console and Sam met him with a kiss. He handed him the food he had packed and the container of banana bread. “Save a couple slices for breakfast tomorrow.”

“I will. Thank you. I’ll see you later.” Sam hopped into his truck and followed Kurt most of the way to Dalton.

“Thanks for coming, everyone,” Blaine said. “I know we’re cutting into study time. I apologize for that. It’s been brought to my attention that we need to improve our dance skills ASAP or we’ll have zero chance of winning Regionals.”
“What do you mean?” Jamison asked.

“I mean that if we look at videos of Nationals performances, we are nowhere near the caliber of those groups. Vocally, yes. Working as a team and dancing, not at all. So, today, we’re going to try a few things out. Kurt…”

Kurt stepped forward. “I’d like anyone who can do a cartwheel to stand.” A handful of guys stood. “Come over to the mat and demonstrate, please.”

They lined up and they each did a couple of cartwheels.

“Good. What else? Front handsprings?”

A few of them demonstrated that they could.

“Okay. Back handsprings?”

A couple.

“Allright. I’ll give you each a couple of minutes to stretch and I want to see your best tumbling moves.” He sat down with them and stretched. “The rest of you can spread out on the floor and stretch too.”

The rest of the Warblers spread out around the mats and started stretching.

“Whoever is ready can go first.”

David stood up. He did quite a few flips, including an aerial back layout. Kurt moved to the edge of the mat. He did a combo round-off, back handspring, back tuck. He turned and did a handstand into a walkover down into the splits. He turned back and took a small run and did a round off, aerial back layout with a half twist, sticking the landing.

“Next.”

Several other guys got up and showed of their tumbling skills. Most of them could only do cartwheels and front handsprings. But it was better than just shuffle stepping.

“Thank you. Now, who can break dance or do any type of pop and lock?”

A couple of guys stood up and demonstrated their skills.

“Nice,” Kurt complimented them. “It seems to me that the athletic and dance skills of this group are grossly underused in competition. You saw Mike and Brittany at Sectionals.”

Everyone nodded.

“Sectionals was a disaster for New Directions. I will not get into details, but a lot of things were problematic. They will have gotten their act together by now. We are looking at a second-place finish at best with our current set list. And that’s okay, if we want to come in second. Not every group performs to win. I mean that elderly choir and the choir from the deaf school compete with us in show choir competitions and they know they can’t win, but they want to perform. They show up, do their best, and they’re happy that they had fun and got to participate. Performing and having fun is their goal. And if that’s our goal, then that’s fine. But if we want to win, we’re not going about it the right way.”

“What do you suggest?” David asked.
“Well, for starters, let’s figure out a way to prop someone’s phone up and record ourselves doing all four of the songs we’ve worked on. After we record all of them, we can watch ourselves and improve our movements. We can change our choreography or leave it as is, but pull out some of the guys that can do flips on one of the songs and have the guys who can break dance or pop and lock on one of the other songs. We already look less interesting than most of the high school groups because we wear uniforms, but if we move more it will help.”

Wes asked, “Who has a few textbooks with them?”

Nick opened his bag and brought four books over and they got them situated on one of the bleachers a few rows up so the phone would stay upright to record.

“Everyone in place for ‘Misery’,” Wes ordered. He hummed the pitch they needed to hear, pressed record and moved to his spot. They waited for Blaine to start and then came in.

“Oh yeah…”

Wes stopped the recording and started a new one for each of the other three songs.

“Nick, do you have your laptop too?” Wes asked as he moved laptop to the bottom bleacher bench close to the mat. He stacked the books up.

“Yes.” He got it out and started it up.

Wes emailed him the video files.

He put his laptop on the stack of books and opened the file so everyone could watch.

They watched all four videos before Wes spoke. “Ideas? Observations?”

“We look like we’re having fun,” Jeff said.

Everyone agreed with him.

“We’re not in sync a lot of the time,” Nick added.

“The choreography is really simple, but we don’t look like we know what we’re doing. Too many people are watching the person in front of them rather than knowing what to do on their own and looking out toward an audience,” Trent said.

Several other comments were made as well.

“So, those were all good observations. How about we move on to ideas,” Wes said.

“Kurt’s ideas were good,” Jeff said. “We need to do what we’re already doing, but do it better and more in sync, and we could feature the different guys in the group that can to flips or are good dancers on two of the songs.”

David spoke up. “I think we need to narrow our list down to three songs first.”

“Maybe not,” Kurt said. “What are the actual rules, Wes? Do they specify the number of songs we can sing or are we allotted a certain amount of time? I’ve always wondered because the presentations have been so varied. I’ve seen a group perform a single song and others sing three.”

Wes got his phone out and pulled up the email he had that had a link to the official rules and read through them carefully. “We have eight minutes from the time we start to sing until we finish, with a
total time allowed to get on and off stage of 10 minutes.”

“So, we could sing all four songs, we’d just need to eliminate repeating a chorus or something from one or two because we’ve already eliminated a verse on each of the songs and condensed any intros and repetitive endings,” Kurt said.

“That’s true,” Thad said.

They spent the afternoon reworking the vocals on the four songs and tightening up the choreography they had learned for “Misery” the previous weekend. They took a break for dinner and met back 30 minutes later to work on sprucing up the rest of their choreography. Before they dismissed for the evening, they recorded themselves again and Wes sent the videos to everyone to watch and make adjustments individually before the next afternoon.

Kurt pushed himself into high gear when he finally got back to his room. He wanted to be able to spend a little time with Sam before they went to sleep. He knew they needed to get to sleep earlier than they had the night before because he had seen the huge list of things Sam still needed to get done and he wanted to be able to help him get through as many of them as he could.

Sam. Sweet Sam. Sam I could fall in love with so easily.

Kurt could barely contain his excitement. An adorable, amazing boy liked him. He remembered what his dad had said to him when they had gone out to dinner the week before – “When you find the right person, you’ll realize what you would have given up by staying with the wrong person.”

I hope Sam feels the same way about me.

As much as he wanted to focus on his reading, he wasn’t succeeding. He put the book away and straightened everything in his room. He went through his assignments and made sure he had everything he needed to actually complete them. He looked through his upcoming assignments and saw that a trip to the school library needed to go on his to-do list. His phone pinged with a text. Sam was there. He hurried downstairs to the front door to meet him.

Kurt opened the door and Sam was already three quarters of the way up the stairs.

“Hey, gorgeous!” Sam took the stairs two at a time. He stepped inside the area between the exterior and interior doors and pulled Kurt into a hug and kissed him.

“Let’s get up to my room before we continue this,” Kurt said. “I know you said you don’t plan to stay in the closet, but I’m pretty sure that having one of the Warblers see you kissing me and it spreading around as a rumor isn’t your plan for coming out.”

“Actually I hadn’t really thought about it, but we can talk about it.” Sam followed Kurt up to his room. “This place is like a school in a fairy tale. Ornate and fancy. It feels like it should be in a movie.”

“I know. When I first came here to spy, I had the same feeling.” Kurt opened his door and let Sam walk in first.

“Your room is smaller than I imagined, given everything else.”
“Well, the double rooms are bigger. This room is smaller because it has it’s own bathroom too. I was placed here because – well, it was part of the late-term enrollment stipulations.”

“So, there are different types of rooms.”

“Yeah, most of the rooms are doubles that share a bathroom between the two rooms, like a suite. So, four people share a bathroom.”

“But you got your own.”

“I did.”

“Karofsky did something to you in the locker room, didn’t he? They made it so you wouldn’t have to share a bathroom because of something he did to you.”

“I can’t talk about it, Sam. I know I’m safe here. And I don’t even know if he would go through with what he threatened, but I can’t put you at risk. If and when he finds out that we’re dating, it’s better if you don’t know anything.”

“I get that you want to protect me. I just hate him. I try not to because hating people never makes anything better. But he hurt you and he made you leave. I lost so much time with you because of him.” Sam pulled him into a hug. “I have a hard time with Finn too, just so you know.”

Kurt wrapped his arms around Sam and just leaned into his embrace. “I already figured you did. Finn said something about you always giving excuses why you can’t hang out with the other Glee guys.”

“Besides the fact that I don’t have time, I just don’t like Finn’s attitude. He’s got some deep homophobia in his heart. He says he doesn’t, but it’s there. I see it. I feel it. He won’t be supportive when I come out. He’ll say that he is, but he won’t be.”

“I know. I had my rose-tinted glasses on last year. Cute football player crush. But you’re right. He doesn’t see it as homophobia though. And maybe it’s because he’s not afraid and he associates the ‘phobia’ part of the word with people who freak out about snakes or something. I think he still sees it as a choice. And if someone can choose, they can un-choose’. So, since he sees it as not normal and a choice, he thinks we should just be normal and choose differently. Maybe I’ll try to sit down and talk to him again sometime.” Kurt stepped back a little and kissed Sam. “Do you want to go ahead and shower and put our pajamas on?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay. Follow me.”

They were lying in Kurt’s bed, covered up with the lights off, kissing. Kurt pulled back a bit and ran his thumb down Sam’s cheek. “As much as I enjoy this, I don’t want it to become the only thing we do when we’re together.”

“Me neither. I want to get to know you better. I’ve liked you for a long time, and getting to spend time with you lately has just cemented that for me. I really like you a lot and I want this between us to work. It’s not just about making out, although you are really fun to make out with.” Sam kissed him.

Kurt laughed. “What are your spring break plans?”
“Oh, I’m taking the day shift that week. Someone wanted off for the week. So, I’ll be working 8-5:00, Monday through Friday. And the person I normally split the evening shift with is coming in at 5:00 instead of 8:00. I still have my weekend shift here the Sunday before spring break and the Saturday and Sunday after. I asked off for Saturday because of Regionals.”

“Well, since your parents let you stay last night, do you think they’d let you stay at my house all week? I’ll work the day shift at the shop. I’m doing the same thing you are. Jimmy wants the week off to spend with his kids. We could spend the evenings and nights at my house all week. I’ll find out if I’m allowed back in the building on Saturday so we can stay here.”

“I’ll ask. I want to. Can I ask you something?”

“You can ask me anything, well except the one thing that I told you I can’t answer.”
“Did you really like *Avatar* or were you just humoring me?”

“I really did like it. It wasn’t what I was expecting with as many people as I heard make fun of it. Maybe the people making fun of it didn’t actually understand the story? Maybe they were expecting something different? I’m not sure. I was serious when I said that I’d need to watch it again to pay more attention to the details. The artistry of it was so amazing, sometimes I lost focus on what was being said because I was looking at the artistry of it.”

“Okay.”

“When I step outside of my usual interest areas and watch something new with you, I won’t try to tear it apart. You’re sharing part of yourself with me. I will watch carefully to see why it means so much to you, not to find ways to ridicule you for liking it. I would hope you would do the same. When we first met, I mentioned several movie stars from the 50s and 60s that you didn’t recognize. I would hope that when we get around to watching some of those movies that you would appreciate what I like about them, even if you would never choose to rewatch the movie on your own. We don’t have to have exactly matching interests to get along. You’re my boyfriend, not my pet project to turn into a clone of me.”

Sam laughed. “That’s good because I am certain that I can’t rock a kilt the way you can.”

“Sweet talker.” Kurt kissed him. “I’m not going to attempt to change you. I didn’t make you think that by offering to cut your hair, did I?”

“No. All you did was trim it up like it had been before it got shaggy. It’s not like you gave me some completely different hairstyle like you were trying to change me.”

“Just checking because I kept teasing you about your hair color back last fall.”

“I don’t dye it.”

“Uh huh.” Kurt kissed him. “Whatever you’re doing to it is fine with me as long as you’re not damaging it. I draw the line at hurting your hair.”

Sam laughed. “So, I could dye it blue and you’d be okay with that?”

“As long as you use a decent product or have it done professionally. I’m pretty sure you don’t want to be sporting the shaved head look when your hair breaks off from all the chemical damage. But as for the color or style, you can do what you like. How we wear our hair is just an expression of ourselves, if we want it to be. Just like our clothes. I’m not going to try to change your style. You totally rock the ‘I threw this on in five minutes’ look in a way that I never could.”

“I don’t know whether to take that as a compliment or an insult.”

“It’s a compliment for sure. This morning, you opened your bag, and put on a Henley and a pair of jeans and you looked really sexy. If I did the same thing, I would look like I was doing the walk of shame after a night out partying.”

Sam laughed. “I can’t say since I’ve never seen you dressed that way.”

“Well, it can be part of the fashion show. I still have the clothes from my butch phase last year.”
"I don’t know. They might be a big turn on.” He kissed Kurt.

“Maybe you’re just a horny teenage boy and anything turns you on.”

“Could be.” He kissed Kurt. “But I’m about 99% certain that it’s YOU in anything that’s the turn on.”

He’s such a flirt and he’s flirting with me!

Sam ran his hand under the edge of Kurt’s shirt over the area where there was still bruising. “Are you sure this doesn’t hurt?”

“I’m sure.”

“It will take an enormous amount of self-restraint not to pummel him into a locker when I see him Monday. And I can guarantee he won’t come out on the winning side if I tell Puck that you still have bruises. He’s oddly protective of you. Almost like he has a crush on you.”

“He probably just feels guilty. He’s the one who told me to come spy on the Warblers that day we were working on ideas for the ‘boys against girls’ competition. And later he couldn’t risk going back to juvie, so he couldn’t beat the crap out of Karofsky to make sure that he left me alone. And then I left and came here. He probably figures that if he hadn’t be stupid enough to end up in juvie in the first place that I’d still be back at McKinley instead of here at ‘Gay Hogwarts.’”

“Could be. But his probation is up, and if he found out that you still have bruises, Karofsky would be sorry. I’m sure he thinks that we can protect you if you came back.”

“I can’t come back with the way things are there. If Azimio and Karofsky were gone, then I could handle the others. I’m still debating about what to do about next year. I don’t want to be protected by a group of students. I want the students in the school to not attack other students. Being protected means that I’d always be in a state of hypervigilance. What if I need to go to the bathroom in the middle of class? Meeting Karofsky in the bathroom alone while everyone else is in class is a perfect way for him to teach me a lesson with no repercussions. I wouldn’t put it past him to get someone in each of my classes to text him if I left the room so he could get me alone. I don’t want covered in slushies. I don’t want shoved when I walk down the halls. I just want to attend school and not be afraid. And all of you protecting me won’t provide that. Plus, I want you to graduate, not get suspended or expelled for fighting.” Kurt kissed him. “I don’t want you hurt instead of me. I want no one to get hurt anymore.”

“So, that’s a good segue to me coming out. You don’t seem to want me to.”

“I don’t want your family to be on the receiving end of what has been done to mine. Your family is already struggling to make ends meet. If people start to vandalize your home, that will only make things worse for your family. If your house is going to go on the market, having it vandalized will lower the property value – a lot. People who want to buy houses don’t want to buy them in neighborhoods with vandalism. Plus, the cost of repairing the damage will only tap into resources you’re trying to collect to prevent the foreclosure.”

“I know, but I don’t want to be secretive.”

“I get that. And I appreciate it. I really do.” He kissed him. “But I want us to be smart about this. You already know that Finn isn’t going to be actually supportive, at least not without some kind of actual counseling or therapy. Quinn can be vicious. I know that you met the reformed, ‘I’m a good girl’ version of Quinn, but she can be a conniving bitch. She was a willing participant in the behavior
that got her pregnant and she treated Puck like he was a rapist half the time. She acted like it was his fault – all of it. She told Finn the baby was his. That’s just evil. After the truth came out, she was awful to Puck most of the time. She is very determined to stay at the top of the food chain. She could go either way on this. She could be supportive by saying that she was intentionally being your beard. Or she could go all ice queen and say that you led her on, lied to her, and broke her heart to get more sympathy from Finn, who I am sure will be starting to lose interest again soon. I already told my dad that I thought he should put Finn in therapy. He’s been yanked back and forth between Rachel and Quinn for the last two years. I don’t know if he actually really likes either one of them. But being desired is highly addictive. You may not know since you weren’t here. He cheated with Rachel when he thought Quinn’s baby was his. It’s a serious soap opera thing with the three of them.”

“I’ve seen her manipulative side. I gave her the benefit of the doubt when I was being played. But I can see her being mean about me saying that I’m gay. I can also see her saying that it was all pre-arranged so that she comes out looking better. I guess it depends on whether she’s looking for sympathy or a pat on the back for helping out a fellow Gleek.”

“It’s a toss up. It will probably depend on whether she still has Finn or not when she finds out.”

“So, how do you want to proceed? I’m willing to face whatever comes at me personally, but you’re right that I don’t want my family to get hurt in the crossfire.”

“Tomorrow, I propose that we just act like friends here in the school. We need more time to formulate a real plan and we need to sleep. I want to help you get caught up, not sleep all morning. I really, really don’t want you to have to repeat this semester. You’ve more than likely already repeated a grade like me.”

“Yeah. Second grade.”

“Third for me.”

“Mine was because no one had figured out that I was dyslexic and I couldn’t read well enough to move on to third grade.”

“I’ll tell you about mine some other time, okay?”

“Sure.”

“How do you want to sleep?”

“Did you sleep okay last night?”

“I did.”

“Then let’s just go with that. We’ll try other ways another time.”

Kurt kissed him, and then turned over. They snuggled up like they had the night before and fell asleep.

The next morning Kurt woke up and stretched and turned over. He kissed Sam gently on the lips.

“Wake up, sleeping beauty.”

“Mmm.”
Kurt giggled.

“I could really get used to this. I really like giggles and cuddles in the morning.” He kissed Kurt. “And kisses.”

“I’m going to get dressed and go grab some food and come back. Go ahead and get started on something while I’m gone.”

Sam didn’t let loose of him and kissed him again. “Homework, smoamwork.” He smiled. “Kisses are much better.”

“I agree. But staying in high school forever is not on the agenda.”

“Don’t be such a Vulcan so early in the morning.”

Kurt laughed. “You’re adorable. My Vulcan self is going to get us food, which will hopefully help turn your brain to study mode.”

“Doubtful, but I’m willing to give it a shot.” He finally released his hold on Kurt, but not until after he had kissed him again.

Kurt put his sweats on and headed down to the cafeteria, where he grabbed an apple, an orange, two Greek yogurts, sneakily wrapped some bacon in some napkins and stuck it in the kangaroo pocket on the front of his hoodie along with the pieces of fruit and the cartons of yogurt. He made two cups of coffee and carried them carefully. The cafeteria monitor looked at him strangely.

“Too much schoolwork. Eating in my room while I read in silence.”

She nodded and let him leave.

He tried to tap on the door with his shoe.

“Kurt?”

“My hands are full. Open the door, please.”

Sam opened it and shut it behind him.

“Spoons,” Kurt said in aggravation.

“Spoons?”

“I don’t have any. We’ll just have to make do.” Kurt emptied his pocket onto his desk.

“Oh, you got the Greek yogurts, but no spoons. That’s okay.”

“Do you want the apple or the orange?”

“You pick. I like both.”

“Me too. Stop being so agreeable and choose what you want,” Kurt teased.

Sam took the orange and started to peel it. Kurt unwrapped the bacon.

“Mmm. I see you snuck out some of the good stuff.”

Kurt laughed. “I did. I couldn’t see any feasible way to get the eggs up here.”
Sam laughed. “I suppose not. This is good.” He opened the container with what was left of the banana bread. “Two slices, just like you asked.”

“I see you liked it a lot or you were just hungry and ran out of food in the sack of food I packed.”

“Actually I saved some of that for today so I wouldn’t get hungry while I’m out delivering this evening. And I love the bread. It’s so bread-like and not full of evil carbs.”

Kurt kissed him. “I’ll make you more next weekend.”

“Thank you.” Sam opened the yogurt and tipped it up like it was a milkshake and poured it into his mouth. What he couldn’t tip out, he used the bread to wipe out and eat.

“Good idea.”

They finished everything and Kurt dumped out the trash. He headed to the bathroom to wash his hands and Sam followed him in.

“Alright. Time to get to work,” Kurt declared.

Under Kurt’s guidance, Sam finished all of the assignments that he hadn’t turned in on time. Kurt took his laptop to the floor computer lab and printed everything out. Sam put it all in the binder with the other assignments.

“Get dressed, but not in your uniform shirt. I got you a meal ticket for lunch. It’s all you can eat. We just need to head back up here in time for you to change your shirt and get to work on time.”

“Thank you.” He put his pajamas in his bag and pulled his clothes out. He pulled the uniform shirt out of Kurt’s closet and hung it over the back of the desk chair. He put all of his schoolwork back in the bag and looked around.

“Just leave that toothbrush here. I’ll get another one for you to use at home. That way you won’t have to keep packing stuff like that.”

Sam nodded. “C’mere.”

Kurt stepped into his open arms. “Thank you for everything. I’m turning all of that in tomorrow. Hopefully, it will be enough to pull my grades back up to at least Ds for now. If I can stay caught up, maybe I can pull them back up to Cs by the end of the year.”

“When you turn these in tomorrow, talk to your teachers again. Now, that they’ve seen that you’re serious, ask them to accept each week’s work the following Monday morning before school.”

“Why?”

“Tell them that you don’t have a laptop anymore and that the library closes right after you get off from work. Explain that you need to do the assignments on the weekends when you have the ability to use a computer and you have more time to get it done. That way maybe you can get full points on all of your work from now on. That way every weekend, I can help you and you can keep up. If you had a laptop and internet access at home, I could help you from here, but without that, there’s nothing I can do from so far away.”

“I’ll ask. The worst they can say is ‘no’ and you’re right, when I hand them all of the missing assignments, maybe they’ll see that I’m trying.”
“Let’s go eat. I usually eat lunch with Trent, Nick, and Jeff. It’s part of my ‘integration into Dalton life’ program the counselor requires of me. I won’t bring up anything about Regionals or your financial situation or anything. I’ll let you answer anything they ask, if they ask. I’ll follow your lead.”

“Have I told you that you’re awesome?”

“Umm. Not in the last hour,” Kurt teased.

Sam grabbed him and hugged him. “Well you are.”

Kurt kissed him. “Come on.”

Sam and Kurt ended up eating lunch alone since the other three were nowhere to be seen.

“They must be trying to finish up their homework because we’re having rehearsal again all afternoon.”

“That’s fine. It just means I get you to myself for longer. The food here is good.”

“It is. I’m sure that’s part of why it costs so much to attend school here. They cook real food and serve it three meals a day, seven days a week.”

“If you lived here in Westerville, could you go to school here still?”

“Yeah. There are day students. Most of them live around here or in Columbus. The tuition itself isn’t that high, well, I mean it’s still expensive compared to free public school, but I don’t think it’s any higher than the other private schools in Columbus. It’s adding the room and board that makes the cost jump up so much. They have to have adults living here and the security staff and all the regular stuff like water bills and electricity bills, and then the enormous amount of food that 400+ teenage boys eat each day.”

“I can imagine. Especially, since you’re not being given tiny servings of slop.”

“Definitely not. They have an excellent salad bar as you have already discovered.”

“It’s delicious. Being broke has not allowed me to eat as many fresh vegetables as I’m used to. I’ve had to stick mostly with carrots and the occasional cucumber as far as fresh vegetables go.”

“Well, you can look forward to a giant salad every Sunday that you spend here with me.”

“Nice side benefit.”

Kurt laughed.

“Seems pretty lopsided though.”

“What?”

“The side benefits.”

“Nope.”

“Completely even, maybe tilted in my direction.”
Sam gave him a puzzled look.

“How many times have I laughed since I picked you up Friday?”

“I don’t know. A lot. I wasn’t counting.”

“Neither was I, but do you know how many times I’d laughed in past three months?”

Sam didn’t say anything.

“None that I can remember. I’ve laughed more in the last three days than I had in the past three months. Spending time with you is fun.”

“Well, that we can agree on. I think spending time with you is fun.”

“Eat, Mr. Rabbit. You have to leave for work soon,” Kurt teased.

After Sam had eaten his fill of salad, they headed back up to Kurt’s room so Sam could change and grab his stuff.

“We’ll have to say our goodbyes up here,” Kurt said. He wrapped his arms around Sam. “Call me whenever you have time. I’ll see you on Friday.” Kurt ended up backing Sam up against the door and kissing him until they were both breathless. Kurt kissed him gently and stepped back so that Sam could grab his coat and put it on. Kurt grabbed his bag and opened the door. Sam stepped out and took his bag. Kurt walked him out the front doors.

“I’ll call you,” Sam said and walked to his truck.

Kurt waved from the sidewalk as Sam drove off.

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Kurt arrived for the Sunday practice to find that Trent was the only one sitting in the practice room.

“Everyone’s in the auditorium. Some of us set the risers up earlier so we could practice using them since we won’t be performing on a flat floor.”

“Good idea. I’ll wait with you until we’ve sent everyone on their way.”

“Thanks.”

“That’s actually what I wanted to do – to thank you. You’ve been genuinely decent to me, even after I showed you some pretty outrageous stuff in Dalton standards.”

“Umm… You’re welcome?”

“I just wanted you to know that I appreciate it.”

“I’m not sure why you think it’s such a big deal, but okay.”

“Oh, well, I guess because I’ve been repeatedly told to stop trying to stand out and that to be successful here I needed to blend in. So, I’ve kept all of the parts of me that didn’t fit the proper prep school boy persona hidden away.”

A couple of other Warblers walked in and Trent sent them on their way to the auditorium.
“Well, I guess I can see why you would do that, but a lot of us have sides of ourselves that we keep hidden too. Mostly because we don’t want it to get back to our parents somehow. We’re beyond lucky that no one in the GAP that day filmed us and posted it to YouTube or sent a copy of the video to the headmaster.”

“Yeah, I definitely would not have shown up if I had known the song selection. When the intro started, I couldn’t believe the council had approved that song to sing when they were so hesitant about the whole thing to start with. I was expecting something G-rated.”

Trent refocused the conversation. “Some of the guys here only follow the No Bullying policy because they need to graduate from this school to follow in the footsteps of their grandfather and father. But others of us are actually quite accepting. You’ve been eating with me and Nick and Jeff. They’re not the typical legacy-type students. Their parents aren’t the disinheriting type.”

“Well, I’m glad for them. Living in someone’s shadow seems completely miserable. I know that being here is hard on me and I get to go home every Friday and be myself. I can only imagine what it’s like to not have that option.”

Trent’s phone pinged. He checked it. “Everyone’s down there now. Let’s go.”

Kurt followed him out.

“Many of us have lived very controlled lives. A lot of guys here really know nothing outside the world of their father’s realms, if you want to think about it that way. All I’m asking is that you consider your hard stance against the guys here judging you for who you are when you are judging them just as harshly for being who they’ve been raised to be.”

“Wow. You’re right. Thanks for standing up to me and pointing that out. I’ll do better.”

“Maybe some of us can too.”

Kurt nodded.

They got in place and ran through their four numbers.

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They sat around Wes’ laptop watching themselves.

“We look better than we did before,” Nick said.

“We do,” Kurt agreed. “Let’s add in some of the flairs we talked about. Obviously the flips and dancing have to take place on the front part of the stage. Let’s dance along with the recording we made without singing and see if we can find a good way to add them in.”

They fooled around for about an hour trying different things.

“Alright, alright,” Wes called them back to order. “It’s 3:00. We’ve got to make a final decision and practice what we decide on for another hour or two and then get back to our schoolwork. We’ll rehearse every day like normal, and hopefully by the end of the week, we’ll look good doing our numbers. Everyone in place. We’ll work until 4:30, record one last run through at that point, and then dismiss for the day.”

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Kurt was sitting alone at dinner until Blaine walked up and plopped his tray down next to him.

“So, what do you think? Do we have a chance now?”

“If we can get it polished by the end of the week, yes.”

“We should have listened to you back last fall.”

“True.”

“So, is it Trent that you’re dating?”

“No.”

“Oh. You’d been spending a lot of time with him, so I just thought…”

“If Trent likes guys, he’s never said so to me, and if you know something I don’t, then keep it to
yourself. You already nearly outing Karofsky and look what that got me. And you outing Jeremiah
and got him fired. Don’t ask me to tell you who I’m dating and don’t guess either. Guessing is just a
way of outing someone by naming guys you know that like guys.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah. I think maybe you should make some appointments to see Mr. Adams and talk to him about
your problem of being oblivious to how your actions affect other people so he can help you learn to
think about what you say and what you do in advance.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Seriously. Really think about it. Jeremiah could have brought a lawsuit against the school for what
the Warblers did. My guess would that he refrained from doing so because he’s not out. Filing a suit
would have outing himself to everyone. He had no leg to stand on with the store itself because sexual
orientation is not a protected status in Ohio. Employers can actually fire someone for being gay.”

“Oh.”

“You either just outing Trent to me by asking me if I was dating him or you just asked me to out him
if we were dating. Everything someone tells you isn’t fair game to be repeated as public knowledge.
The person I’m dating may not be out. Asking me who it is could be asking me to out him.”

“I hadn’t thought about it that way.”

“Obviously.” Kurt deadpanned. “Look, I WANT to believe that you are a decent person and that
none of the stuff you did was done to harm anyone intentionally. But you can’t keep doing these
things. You’re 16, not 8 accidentally telling someone about their surprise birthday party.”

“Right.”

“All of us could have gotten suspended. If any of the Warblers are here on scholarship, they could
have lost that and been expelled.”

“Fine. I screwed up. I get it. I won’t ask about your boyfriend.” He stood up, picked his tray up and
moved to a different table.

Kurt left his tray and got up and followed him and sat down. “Getting angry and stomping off is very
childish. You did this to me once before and left me stranded at the Lima Bean. You should make an
appointment with Mr. Adams. He could help you.” Kurt went back to his own seat and sat down.

Ugh!

A few minutes later, Trent came in and sat down with him.

“You may want to rethink eating with me.”

“Why’s that?”

“Blaine came over here earlier and asked if we were dating.”

Trent started to say something.

“Stop. Don’t say anything. I pointed out that by asking me that, he was either outing you or asking me to out you and that the conversation wasn’t happening beyond me saying that we were not dating.”

“Okay.”

“I am not asking you to tell me anything, nor am I making any assumptions. I told Blaine he needed to think before he talks. BUT on the off chance that you have at some point told Blaine that you like guys AND you don’t want that to be common knowledge, I’d suggest talking with him in private and pointing out that you don’t want the information repeated. Please don’t respond. I don’t want to know one way or the other. At some point in the future, if you consider me a close friend and you want to tell me personal, private information, you can rest assured that I will keep it to myself.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I have to assume that there are as many closeted guys here as there are in other schools, probably more because of the well-published No Bullying policy. But even if we go with a low estimate of 5% of the population being gay, and there are about 400 students here, more or less, then 20 guys in this school are gay. I only know two. The other 18 have decided not to be open about it or are only open about it to a select group of close friends, which is fine. I just won’t be a part of outing people ever again. I swore I never would be and then I was part of the GAP Attack. Never again.”

“I get it. I didn’t know we had outing him.”

“Yeah, we did. He got fired over it.”

“Oh, my God. That’s awful.”

“It is. Anyway, back to why I brought this whole topic up. I am openly gay and by sitting with me so frequently, you may inadvertently be associated with my homosexual deviance. I will not be offended if you chose to stop sitting with me alone. We can just eat lunch together with Nick and Jeff. I don’t want to cause problems for you.”

“That’s kind of you. I’ll think about it.”

“That’s fine. I’ll still be your friend. We’ll just have to make sure other people are around as well.”

He nodded.

“I’m going to go ahead and go. I’m not really hungry anymore and I still have some assignments to do tonight.” Kurt got up and put his tray on the conveyor.
When Kurt got back up to his room, he got busy on what he had left to do. A couple of hours later, he had gotten all of the assignments that had to be turned in finished. He still had a bit of reading to do, but he felt better that nothing was going to be late.

He was putting his textbooks back on his shelf when he heard a piece of paper slide across the floor. He turned to look and there was a sheet of notebook paper folded in thirds on his floor near his door.

He picked it up and unfolded it. “Kurt, I thought about what you said. I’m sorry, but I can’t eat breakfast with you alone anymore. Please forgive me. I’m not brave like you. Please get rid of this after you read it. I talked to Blaine. I hope he took me seriously and keeps his mouth shut. I’d still like to eat lunch with you and Nick and Jeff.”

*Poor Trent. He was obviously in the group of guys that might get disowned. And Blaine and his big mouth, ugh.*

He took the piece of paper into his bathroom and filled his sink with an inch of water and submerged the piece of paper in the water until the ink ran and it was completely illegible. Then in frustration, he ripped it into teeny tiny pieces and dumped them in his trashcan as tears streaked down his cheeks.

He went back into the bathroom to dry his hands and his phone started to ring. He picked it up off of his desk and saw that it was Sam.

“Hey, Sam.” He did his best to sound cheerful.

“Hey, come downstairs. I want to see you again before I go back to Lima.”

“Are you in the lot?”

“Yeah. I’ll be at the doors by the time you get downstairs.” The line went silent.

Kurt wiped his face and slipped his phone and his keys in his pocket and went down to the front doors. Sam was waiting when he opened the door. Sam stepped inside and wrapped his arms around him and kissed him.

“Let’s go to the visitor’s room. I doubt anyone ever uses it 45 minutes before curfew.”

Sam let go of him and followed him to the room. Sam closed the door behind them and leaned against it. He opened his arms for Kurt to step closer again. He nearly fell into Sam’s arms.

“Hey, what’s wrong? You’ve been crying.”

“I… I shouldn’t do this to you. I’m sorry.” Kurt stepped back and wrapped his arms across his chest. “We shouldn’t do this. I should have said ‘no’.”

“Kurt, what are you talking about?”

“Us. I shouldn’t have said ‘yes’. Being with me is just going to get your hurt. I’m so sorry.”

“Come back over here, please.”

Kurt shook his head. “I can’t. I can’t do this to you.”

“Are you breaking up with me?”
“I don’t know what to do, Sam.”

“Please don’t break up with me.” Sam moved from the door and stood closer to Kurt and opened his arms. “Please tell me what’s wrong.”

Kurt couldn’t hold himself back anymore and he stepped into Sam’s embrace.

“That’s better. What’s gotten you so upset? You don’t really want us to break up do you?”

“No, never. Not at all. I just don’t want you hurt.”

“You’re not really making much sense.”

“I know. I’m sorry.”

“Try to explain.”

“I’ve been eating breakfast with one particular Warbler, who has been very nice. I thought we were becoming friends. Well, anyway, I got a note a few minutes ago telling me that he can’t eat with me alone anymore. I’m assuming he can’t risk it getting back to his parents somehow and him being accused of dating me and being gay.”

“Oh. Isn’t that the same as bullying?”

“Not exactly – if it’s adults doing it. If someone here tells their father and their father says something to this Warbler’s father, it’s not a student bullying a student. It’s adults ostracizing people and their closeted gay son. And potentially causing that closeted gay son to be questioned until he admits he’s gay, and then him getting disowned.”

“I figured there were lots of gay guys here because of the No Bullying policy.”

“Oh, there probably are. But that doesn’t mean that they’re out. I would imagine a lot of students that have been bullied before they came here opt to behave as straight as possible once they’re here. It’s hard to keep switching high schools. You know that.”

“Yeah. I played straight when I came to McKinley. I get it. There is a policy preventing them from being bullied, but they still keep it to themselves.”

“I’m just trouble. Associating with me is just asking for trouble.”

“Hey, now. Stop. Unless you actually have decided that you don’t like me and you don’t want to be my boyfriend, we aren’t breaking up. Is that what’s happened? You’ve realized that you don’t actually like me?”

Kurt started crying again. Sam pulled him back toward one of the two-seaters and sat down and tried to pull Kurt into his lap. Kurt started laughing through his tears.

“I’m barely shorter than you. Sitting on your lap?”

“You’re flexible. Figure it out.”

“Scoot that way a little.” Kurt waited for him to move over, and then he straddled his lap, basically kneeling on the seat with his butt on Sam’s legs.

Sam wiped the tears from his face. “Now, tell me the truth. Your feelings about me – none of the other stuff.”
“I like you a lot, which is why this is all such a mess. I don’t want you hurt.”

“Breaking up with me will hurt a LOT. I really like you, Kurt. Don’t do this to us. You’re not like anyone I’ve ever met. I feel comfortable with you. I trust you.”

“I feel the same way.”

“Then it’s settled. No more of this nonsense talk. We’ll figure out how to deal with stupid people somehow – together.” Sam moved his hands from Kurt’s waist and put them on the sides of Kurt’s face and gently guided Kurt to move forward a bit and he kissed him.

Kurt wrapped his arms around Sam’s shoulders and leaned into the kiss, allowing the kiss to deepen. When the broke apart for air, Kurt spoke. “We’ll keep this to ourselves and just our parents knowing until the issue of your house is solved. Once it’s sold or the situation is resolved, we’ll talk again about letting other people know. Is that reasonable for now?”

“Yes.” Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt and held him close.

Kurt pulled back a bit and kissed Sam. He ran his fingers through the back of Sam’s hair. When they broke apart for air, Kurt said, “Thank you.”

“For kissing you?” Sam teased. “That’s my pleasure, for sure.” He pecked Kurt on the lips making Kurt laugh.

“For not just giving up and taking the easy way out.”

“Leaving you wouldn’t be the easy way. I wasted a lot of time doing things the easy way. This – with you – feels right in a way that nothing ever has.”

“You’re a sweet talker. Always making me blush and feel good.”

“Good. You should feel good about yourself. You’re awesome, even if a bunch of prep school boys are too concerned about their image to stick around to be your friend. It’s their loss. I’m not that dumb. You already said I could keep you. I’m going to hold you to that.” He wrapped his arms around Kurt tight and held him close and then loosened his grip. “Don’t try to set me free again like you did last fall. I don’t want to be free. I want to be with you. I wanted it then and I want it even more now.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I forgive you. I’m not angry. It makes me sad that some people are awful. But your parents know. My parents know. The only people who really matter to me support me. We’re both going to be 18 by the end of the semester. Even if we have to hold out that long not telling anyone else, I won’t give up on us.”

“Okay.” Kurt nodded. “Okay. If you’re sure.”

“I’m sure, Kurt.” Sam wiped the tears from his cheeks again.

“I’m sorry I’m such a mess.”

“Ten years of facing this crap mostly alone would make anyone a mess. Let me be here for you. We’ll face it together, okay?”

Kurt nodded. He scooted back and stood up. “You have to get going. You have a long drive home.”
He pulled Sam up to standing and then wrapped his arms around him. “Thank you. Call me whenever you have time. I’ll see you Friday. I’m going to ask my dad about spring break. Whenever you call, I’ll let you know, and then you can ask your parents, okay?”

“Yeah.” Sam kissed him one last time and they walked toward the door.

“Dad?”

“Yeah, kiddo.”

“What are the chances of sending Finn away for spring break?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, I’d like to spend the whole week at home without him there.”

“Why?”

“Because I want to spend time with Sam. Finn never spends any time with me other than the enforced family meal on Friday nights. He leaves after we eat and rarely comes back before I head back here. I know that he and I need to have a talk, but he needs to talk to someone else first who can help him get his head on a little straighter before I try to work things out with him. I know it sounds drastic, but maybe a week at a therapy clinic with weekly follow-up sessions.”

“You’re serious, aren’t you?”

“I’m absolutely serious. His only goal is to stay at the top of the McKinley social ladder. That’s only useful for another 14 months or so. He doesn’t study. He’s played football with a lousy team, even with whatever they just won. I don’t think he’s good enough to get recruited. Maybe I’m wrong, but it’s a long shot anyway. He’s with Quinn, but that will only last until Rachel snags him back. He goes wherever he gets the most attention. Once one of them has him, he loses interest and the other one works to get him back. He’s not an object to be fought over.”

“Well, that’s true enough.”

“Rachel is determined to go to New York and make it on Broadway. Finn is not a big city guy. Quinn just wants social standing for now, but I have no idea what her long-term goals are, if she has any. But I don’t think they involve staying in Lima. Whichever one of them has him at graduation next year is just going to leave him behind eventually. Rachel will try to keep it up for a while. Quinn would just cut him loose and move on once he doesn’t suit her purpose anymore. This seminar I’m taking is really making me think about a lot of things and McKinley doesn’t offer anything like this. No one is pointing the students at McKinley in the direction of their futures.”

“Alright, alright. I get it. I’ll talk to Carole. She has several days off. Maybe she can take him to her aunt’s place in Zanesville for a few days and I can see what I can find to get him some help.”

“I can ask the counselor here for some suggestions.”

“That’s fine. We could take him some place in Columbus for some jobs testing or aptitude tests or something. He does need to figure out what he wants to do. Because if it’s go to college, he needs to actually start studying.”

“You’re not going to want to hear this, but most of the teachers at McKinley won’t give him below a
“C because he’s the popular quarterback. I’ve seen him try to cheat off of Brittany.”

“Oh, God.”

“Yeah. I’d have his general knowledge tested so you have some idea of whether he needs a tutor to actually learn what he should already know.”

“And you had a crush on him.”

“DAD! He was cute and nicer to me than any of the other guys. And despite my general lack of interest in sports, jocks are cute.”

“I don’t want to hear this.”

“You started it. It was a shallow first crush, which is long, long over.”

“It’s Sam now.”

“That’s different.”

“I know. I’ll get Finn out of the house for spring break. Give me a day or so to come up with a working plan before you get Sam’s hopes up though.”

“Alright.”

“Dwight, Hiram, and I are going to the bank tomorrow. Hopefully, something positive will come out of that.”

“I hope so. Sam doesn’t want to stay in the closet and I keep pressuring him to not come out.”

“I thought you’d be thrilled that he didn’t want to hide that you’re dating.”

“I don’t want his house targeted like ours was. They’re trying to get things settled so they can sell it. If it gets vandalized, that will make it harder to sell. If you get things settled with the house, then I’ll feel less like a harbinger of doom for him and his family.”

“His parents are fine with him seeing you, just in case you had any doubts.”

“He said they were, but thanks for reinforcing it. They haven’t been around long enough to know what a bad thing it is to be associated with me though.”

“Why are you so down on yourself again?”

“I got dumped by the person I had come the closest to making friends with here earlier this evening. Even in a school where bullying isn’t allowed by the students, there’s nothing preventing those students from telling their parents that someone is gay by association and those parents saying things to the parents of the student in question and then causing that student to potentially be disowned by his parents.”

“That was very convoluted. So, someone you’ve been spending time with is afraid that his parents will find out that he is gay because he has made friends with the openly gay student?”

“More or less. He never actually said that he was gay, but that’s the impression I got from the letter he shoved under my door. He’s only 16. They could send him to conversion therapy. Or disown him and make him file for emancipation.”
“God, what is wrong with people?”

“That question does not have a short answer.”

“I get it. Even where you’re safe, you’re not accepted. It sucks. I hope that advocate has a good plan on Friday. Maybe you can come back to McKinley.”

“That’s not all that likely, but anything is possible, I suppose. But definitely not this year. I’ve worked too hard to leave before the end of the term. These classes will look a lot better on my transcript than the ones at McKinley. If Karofsky and Azimio are still at McKinley, maybe I could do some type of dual enrollment. I’m going to find out about my options. Maybe I could do pre-calc, US Government, some easy elective like Spanish, and Glee at McKinley and then take 3 classes at OSU Lima. Since I was going to take AP French, AP English and AP European History here next year, which would give me college credit. Or if they’re gone, I could play football again or join Cheerios, which would prevent the other football players from being able to hassle me because Coach Beiste would kick them off the team for hurting the team’s chances at winning. And Coach Sue would string them up for going after a Cheerio, but that would put me back to wearing the dumb uniform every day again. I don’t know. How about I just find a magic wand and make people stop being jackasses?”

“Yeah. You do that and I want to borrow it.”

“Sure.”

“I gotta get some sleep, kiddo. And so do you. You have class early.”

“I know. Please let me know what happens at the bank, if you can. I’ll see you Friday at the house. I’m not heading into the school alone to possibly confront Karofsky. I have no idea what this meeting is actually for, but I want to walk into the building with you and Carole, if she’s coming.”

“You got it, bud. Come home and we’ll drive over at the same time or together.”

“Night, Dad.”

“Night, kiddo.”

Monday at lunch, Kurt called Mrs. Huntington and asked her about Sam’s situation with being dyslexic. She gave him a lot of information. She agreed to meet with Sam after the meeting with McKinley on Friday. He thanked her for her time and texted Sam asking him to call as soon as possible after school.

Kurt had sat alone at breakfast. And since he had plans to make the phone call at lunch, he had taken his tray outside and sat on a bench in the courtyard. It wasn’t exactly warm outside yet, but it wasn’t freezing anymore either. He stayed outside after he finished the call and ate alone. He looked through his agenda after he finished eating. Ten more weeks of school. He could survive.

Maybe if his dad and Hiram got the back issue worked out, Sam wouldn’t have to work all weekend anymore and he could just come to Westerville and spend the weekend with Kurt every weekend. He tried to think positive thoughts. The warning bell rang for the end of lunch. He hopped up and took his tray inside, put it on the conveyor, and headed off to class.

The Warblers ran through their set four times after school, recording the last run-through to review like the had been doing. Kurt headed to the library to get the books he needed and went straight back
to his room with them, hoping that Sam would get a chance to call somehow. He didn’t, but he did
text Kurt saying that he would call the instant he got home from work.

Kurt gathered the information he needed from the books and finished the assignments that he had to
turn in the next day. He decided to take one of his textbooks with him to dinner and read it in an
effort to keep anyone from attempting to sit down with him. He wasn’t going to be the cause of any
family problems for anyone.

After dinner, he did all of his reading and even read ahead for the next day while waiting for Sam to
call. Finally, at 8:30, his phone rang.

“Hey, Sam.”

“Sorry I couldn’t call earlier. I ended up leaving Glee before Schue dismissed us so I wouldn’t be
late to work.”

“It’s fine, sweetie. Really. I just wanted to let you know that the advocate I got is willing to help you.
Can your dad come to the school on Friday at 2:00? And he needs to bring whatever documentation
you have about being dyslexic with him, copies if possible, so that the advocate can take them with
her.”

“Um, I’m sure he can. He’ll only be able to stay like an hour though ‘cause he’s got to be at
McDonald’s at 4:00 to work and I have to get to work too.”

“That’s fine. I doubt a first meeting would last very long. It’s just that you’re not 18 yet, so one of
your parents has to sign the forms.”

“Alright. How will this help?”

“She says you should get time and a half for all tests, even the state ones you have to retake this
summer.”

“Well, that would help. I’ll make sure my dad can be there. Where should he go?”

“I think we’re meeting in Miss Pillsbury’s office, but if it changes, I’ll text you and you can tell him.”

“Alright.”

“I should know by tomorrow night what my dad has managed to plan for Finn to get him out of the
house during spring break.”

Sam laughed. “Sounds ominous.”

“It might include spending time on a farm in really rural Ohio.”

“I see.”

“Did you talk to your dad yet? How did the bank thing go today?”

“He’s not back from work yet. He gets off at 9:00. But I did talk to all of my teachers today. They
agreed to the plan of letting me turn everything from the previous week in on Monday before classes
start on a week-to-week basis. So, if I keep my word and bring it all completed on Monday morning,
then I can do the same thing the next week without being marked down. If I miss assignments still,
the deal’s off.”

“Well, then we’ll just have to make sure not to miss any. I’ll let you eat and do whatever you need to
so you can talk to your dad when he gets home. Call me back later, okay?”

“‘Kay.”

Kurt jumped in the shower, did his moisturizing routine, and then worked on his history paper until Sam called back.

“So, I talked to my dad and he’ll be at the school on Friday with the papers.”

“Good.”

“And he said the bank meeting was interesting. I guess they jumped the gun and did some things they shouldn’t have and in the interest of not getting sued for the things they shouldn’t have done, they’re eliminating a large portion of the fees. So, my dad had enough to pay the back payments and the lowered fees today, which pulled the house from foreclosure. He’s going to talk to a realtor tomorrow and list the house.”

“I’m sorry you’re going to have to move again, but I’m glad your family can recoup the down payment and sell rather than lose the house in foreclosure.”

“My dad is thrilled. He’s also gotten a second interview, with a company on the Kentucky side of Cincinnati for a good job.”

“Oh. I mean I’m glad he’s getting an interview, but does that mean you’ll be moving to Kentucky?”

“Not if I can help it. Like you said, we’re both turning 18 soon. I don’t want to move to Kentucky. I’m going to see what I can figure out. We can talk about it this weekend after my dad’s interview and after the advocate meeting.”

“I won’t keep you. I know we both need to go to sleep. I’m really glad the stress is off about the house. Are you going to quit delivering pizzas?”

“I don’t know. I have to think about a lot of things. Even if I do, I’ll give my two-weeks notice this week, so I’ll still need to finish the next couple of weekends.”

“Try to sleep. I’ll try too.”

“‘Kay.”

The phone went silent.

Kentucky? Ugh. No time to think about that now. Sleep.

He turned off the lights and got in his bed, but sleep eluded him. He lay in bed doing calculations and thinking about way too many things until he finally fell asleep.

“So you can’t tell me why you’re eating alone again?”

“Nope.”

“You’re going to have to do better than that. You’ll have to join a club where you have to interact.”

“Fine.”
“What else is going on?”

“I’m meeting Mrs. Huntington at McKinley Friday along with my dad, but I really have no idea what to expect.”

“I’ve not been to that particular type of meeting, but I would imagine that the school will be answering the claim that they were negligent and they will argue that they weren’t and Mrs. Huntington will press them alone with the lawyer she brings with her and they will cave and pay your tuition and fees for this year. I do however doubt that she will be successful in procuring the money for next year. They will suggest multiple other placements, like North Lima or a school in Findlay or somewhere within driving distance of your house. Or they will assure her that the student responsible for the threat won’t be at McKinley anymore. His overturned expulsion will be reinstated and he’ll be ‘offered’ the opportunity to enroll elsewhere for next school year or have the expulsion put in his permanent record, which will probably prevent him from getting any athletic scholarships.”

“I see. Well, at least the money for this year will help my family since keeping me here is straining my family’s budget. I didn’t figure I would be able to come back next year anyway. I know my family can’t afford another year here. Even with the refund for this year, it’s not enough to cover all of next year. I didn’t come until four weeks before the end of last semester. I’m assuming that my cost to attend the full year next year would nearly twice what we paid this year, minus the cost of the uniforms since I already have those now.”

“So, what will you do?”

“I have no idea. Expelling him or ‘offering’ to let him leave willingly will not change the actual situation. He still lives in Lima. He still has friends at McKinley. It’s just a mess.”

“Life is like that sometimes. No matter how many times you rearrange your tiles, you still can’t spell any winning words.”

“Yes. I’ve had a handful of Z’s and X’s my whole life.”

“And you had hoped that coming here would be a redeal that included some vowels and instead you have an entire row of A’s and I’s.”

“You got it.”

“I get the impression that you’ve made up your mind about next school year and that you’re not returning to Dalton.”

“I’m not. And I agree with you that no matter what happens on Friday that my school district won’t pay for me to attend Dalton next year. The academics here are fantastic. It’s a really amazing school and I’ve learned a lot, but I’m going to pursue the dual-credit program at OSU Lima. Could you help me with that?”

“Sure. I’ll send in the school’s part of the paperwork later this afternoon. You’ll need two recommendations.” He opened a drawer and pulled out a small packet. “You’ll need to read through these guidelines and follow the procedures.”

“Thank you. I can do that.”

“I’ll let you leave early so you can get started on the application process and I’ll do my part, but you have to find something to join before spring break and stop by and let me know what it is.”

Kurt stood up and walked to the door. “Yes, Mr. Adams.”
At dinner he sat alone. Trent, Nick, and Jeff found him and put their trays down and sat with him.

“Stop avoiding us,” Jeff said.

“I don’t want anyone to be ‘gay by proxy’.”

“Let us deal with that. My parents and Nick’s don’t have spies at the school. Plus, our parents don’t care. Blaine said you have a boyfriend. Trent can just tell his family that he’s being nice because he’s supposed to if someone tells his family that he’s hanging around with the gay kid. The gay kid who already has a boyfriend…”

“Fine. I guess I’ll have yet one more talk with Blaine about what the word ‘gossip’ means. Yes, I have a boyfriend, but Blaine was the only one who knew.”

“You don’t even talk to him anymore, so how did he find out?” Nick asked.

“After he decided I should be his duet partner last week. He asked me out after that and I turned him down because I already have a boyfriend.”

“I see,” Nick said.

“Then he asked me if Trent was my boyfriend because Trent and I had been eating breakfast together just the two of us. I told him that I wasn’t going to answer him – that who I was dating was my business. So, maybe he’s just trying to get someone to confess to being my boyfriend by mentioning it to people. But my boyfriend isn’t out. He wouldn’t answer ‘yes’ and I won’t say who he is. I don’t tell people’s private information to other people.”

“We get it. We won’t ask. It doesn’t matter to us whether you have a boyfriend or not as far as wanting to be your friends,” Jeff said.

“Alright. I was just trying to protect you.”

“We get that,” Nick said. “But we don’t need protected. We do actually like you. You can’t bail on us that easily.”

“Thanks.”

The next day right before the school day started, Kurt went back to see the counselor.

“Mr. Adams, I respectfully request that you refrain from forcing me to join another club. I have looked through the entire list. I can’t join anything that meets on the weekends or Friday after school. I have Warbler’s rehearsal directly after last period four days a week. I’m tutoring four students. Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, I tutor right after Warblers’ rehearsal. Wednesday, I start a half-hour later because I come here to see you. I am taking six classes, which means I’m occupied 35 hours a week for that. I am in a club that meets four hours a week, a second club that meets one hour a week and I work anywhere from 8-12 hours a week and drive three hours to get home and back each weekend. I have like 20 hours of homework a week. Adding in mealtimes and I’m booked nearly 80 hours a week. I’m busy enough. Joining a third club will not increase my chances of making friends with anyone.”

Kurt paused and took a deep breath.
“I’m eating with Trent, Nick and Jeff again. They approached me last night after I had been sitting by myself again.”

“Why did you quit eating with them?”

“Is what I say to you absolutely confidential?”

“Yes, unless someone is at risk of being hurt or you’re at risk for hurting yourself.”

“Fine. After Blaine pointedly asked me if Trent was my boyfriend, thereby effectively outing Trent to me, Trent quit eating with me by ourselves because he was afraid it would get back to his father that he had befriended the gay kid and that his father would accuse him of being gay by association. You know, ‘birds of a feather, flock together’ kind of thing. I can’t quit being gay. I can’t make the students’ fathers stop being homophobic. I quit sitting with him because he said he couldn’t risk it. After that, I just went back to eating alone to prevent the same thing from happening to anyone else.”

“Wow. I didn’t really expect that answer. I’ll stop pushing you.”

“Thank you. Some people here do not want to be friends with me. While you can say that ignoring someone is a form of bullying, there is no crime to punish. You can’t punish anyone here for ignoring me.”

“I get that. But Nick and Jeff aren’t bothered by the fact that you’re gay?”

“There are probably plenty of students who avoid me who aren’t bothered by it personally, but whose families would react like Trent’s. But Nick and Jeff said that their families wouldn’t care. And they pointed out that now that I had a boyfriend, it would be fine for Trent to spend time with me because he could just tell his father that I have a boyfriend. Of course, Blaine was the one to share the fact that I have a boyfriend with people.”

“I see.”

“I’m in this close to reporting him for bullying or whatever is one step below that just so that he has to come to talk to you. He has outing or potentially outing three people now. He could get someone killed.”

“Maybe I’ll just invite him for a chat to see how he’s doing.”

“Whatever you think would help. I’ve tried stepping back and working toward rebuilding a friendship with him, but I just can’t. But I am not eating alone, so are we good? No third club requirement?”

“You’re fine. I didn’t realize all of the complications to what I had asked you to do.”

“Thank you. I’ll see you the Wednesday after spring break. I have to go to class.” Kurt left the office.

“Order!” Wes bellowed as he banged the gavel on the desk. “Quiet. We’ll head the auditorium to practice as soon as we cover a few details. Saturday morning, we will hold a one-hour rehearsal from 10-11 before we board the bus to go to the competition. Everyone will wear their full uniform, no exceptions. We will arrive at the venue at 11:30 and will be given 20 minutes to rehearse on the stage. The competition starts at 1:00. The school is sending sack lunches for us to eat.”

David spoke, “Everyone head to the auditorium.”
Kurt hung back in an attempt to speak to Wes. Wes noticed and stayed at the desk. “Yes, Kurt?”

“I told you that I couldn’t be here on Friday because I have to go to Lima. Scheduling a rehearsal before the competition will mean that I have to leave Lima at 8:00 in the morning and drive back here to practice an hour just to turn around and ride 30 minutes back towards Lima. I’m supposed to work four hours Saturday morning. I was going to go in at 6:30 so I could leave at 10:30 to arrive on time at the competition venue.”

“I’m sorry Kurt, but we need the extra rehearsal time since I would have normally added the extra rehearsal tomorrow after school.”

“I guess I thought the people at this school understood what commitment and family obligations mean. Now, my dad will be shorthanded Saturday morning and fall behind and make his customers angry because I have to attend a last-minute rehearsal. If you had told me a few days ago, maybe he could have gotten someone to cover my shift, but it’s unlikely since it’s the first Saturday of spring break and lots of people asked off.” Kurt practically stormed off and headed to the auditorium. He put on his performance face and moved through every number as flawlessly as he could. The instant they finished, he left.

“Dad, I’m really sorry.”

“Sorry doesn’t get the work done, Kurt.”

“I know. He just told us a little over an hour ago. There’s nothing I can do.”

“The meeting’s been moved to the superintendent’s office.”

“I need the address, Dad. Text it to me as soon as we hang up. I’ll be at the house at noon.” Kurt ended the call. He waited for the address and then texted it to Sam informing him of the new location.

What a mess! I have to pack as soon as this tutoring session is over.

Once he was in his room after the tutoring session, he packed everything he thought he’d need over spring break. He put it in the Navigator before he went to dinner. He still had to attend his first two periods the next day and turn in all of his work for the whole day before he left. He didn’t want to have to make a trip to his room too. He’d just go to the meeting in his uniform if he had to.

He ate dinner with Nick and Jeff, returned to his room, and completed all of his assignments. He looked around and didn’t find anything he had forgotten. He got ready for bed and waited for Sam to call before he went to sleep.

He managed to get his tutoring vouchers turned in, his assignments turned in, and out of the school parking lot by 10:15. He drove straight home, carried his belongings up to his room, changed clothes, and then headed right back down the stairs to get back in the Navigator and followed Burt to the school district’s main building.

The meeting was unusual. Mr. Karofsky and David were present. Mrs. Huntington and a lawyer, Mr. Stewardson, were there. The superintendent was there and a few school board members, as well as Coach Sylvester, Coach Beiste, Miss Pillsbury, and Principal Figgins.
Mr. Stewardson presented the school with the case, which they summarily rejected without consideration. But with quite a bit of legalese from both Mrs. Huntington and Mr. Stewardson, those who were opposed stopped objecting. An hour later, David was given the opportunity to voluntarily withdraw his attendance from McKinley for the upcoming school year or face the disciplinary action that he was due and accept his expulsion.

Once the portion that included the Karofskys ended, they were escorted out of the room. Mrs. Huntington asked the school board and Principal Figgins their plan for putting an end to the bullying at McKinley, but got no reasonable response.

“My client will not be returning to the school without a written plan in place that provides for his safety along with the safety of the other previously targeted students. This is currently a single case, but should you decide to not provide an adequate plan in the next two weeks, I will seek out the other students who have been on the receiving end of the endless bullying that goes on in your school. We will file a group suit with every student that has been physically bullied. You’re looking at being faced with paying the out-of-district placement fees for upwards of 40 students. Consider that when you think about not complying with our request for a written plan outlining how McKinley will be the safe zone that schools in Ohio should be.”

The superintendent spoke up. “The district cannot cover the out-of-district placements for that many students.”

“Then find a way to keep your students safe in the school they’re in,” she replied. “And have it ready to present in two weeks time or I will move forward with speaking to the students and families that could be eligible for out-of-district placements. This will not continue. My client has bruises that haven’t healed and he has been out of your school for four months. Enough is enough. You have two weeks.” She began packing her papers back in folders and into her briefcase.

“Kurt, can I speak to you for a moment?” Coach Sue asked as most of the people left the room.

“Sure.” He followed her to the corner of the room where she spoke very quietly. “I like the attack dog. Good for you. I told those bozos that they were breaking the law, but I didn’t have the leverage to force their hands. Good job. Think about rejoining the Cheerios in the fall. You and Santana would make great co-captains.” Sue turned and walked out of the room, not giving him time to answer.

He walked back over to Mrs. Huntington. “We’re meeting Sam and Mr. Evans in 20 minutes. Should they come to this room?”

“No. I’ve asked for a small conference room. It’s room 4. I already let Mr. Evans know.”

“Thanks. And thank you for what you just did. I guess we’ll see what they come up with in two weeks.”

“We will. Even if they come up with a foolproof plan, there will be an addendum that says that if at any point your safety is compromised, they will pay for an out-of-district placement. One toe across the line and you will be moved.”

“I’m not sure that’s what I want because I want everyone else to be safe too. I guess we’ll just see what they offer. I don’t want to stay at Dalton, but I don’t want a secret service detail at McKinley either. I want safety, not protection.”

“That’s my goal. Let’s move down to the other room. You will be free to stay if Sam and his father agree. Let me say goodbye to your father, and then I’ll meet you in room 4.”
Kurt nodded and headed out of the room.
“Mr. Evans, Sam it’s nice to meet to meet the two of you. I’m Eleanor Huntington and I’m here to advocate for Sam to get the support that he needs from McKinley.”

“It’s nice to meet you Mrs. Huntington,” Dwight said as he shook her hand.

Sam nodded.

“I need Mr. Evans’ permission for Kurt to remain in the room.”

“It’s fine with me, ma’am,” Dwight responded.

“Alright, then. Let’s proceed.”

Kurt sat down next to Sam.

“Miss Pillsbury, were you aware of the fact that Sam Evans is dyslexic?”

“Yes, ma’am. He told me so when he came to the school last fall and enrolled in courses.”

“Why was he not offered a 504 Plan or an IEP to provide services due to this learning difference?”

“He didn’t request any special accommodations. The school doesn’t offer any help that isn’t requested.”

“Are you aware that the school is breaking the law by not providing an appropriate education to your disabled students.”

“I am, but when I spoke to Principal Figgins, I was told that due to budget shortfalls, that only students who specifically asked for help would be given any help.”

“I’m going to let that go for now, but the fact that you knew jeopardizes your position at the school.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I have copies of Sam’s official diagnosis from a private provider in Tennessee along with his previous school district’s assessment of Sam’s issues. His school district in Tennessee opted to place him out-of-district and pay the day school tuition for him to attend a private school that offered specialized instruction for dyslexic students. There is a very similar school in Columbus. It would have been appropriate for McKinley to offer a similar placement or to at least have offered the appropriate accommodations.”

“I understand, ma’am.”

“You will provide a written statement for Sam’s records that will be sent to any colleges that he applies to that delineates the failings on the part of William McKinley High School to appropriately support Sam this school year. Colleges rely heavily on a student’s work during their junior year to determine the student’s probability at succeeding in a university setting. Your school’s lack of support could potentially cost Sam a spot at the colleges he is interested in attending.”

“Yes, ma’am.”
“And by the time Sam returns from spring break, you will have written up a 504 Plan for him that allows time and a half on all written tests. He will be allowed extra time to turn in papers. And most importantly, you will provide proof that you have filed the appropriate paperwork for him to receive time and a half on the remaining OGTs that he has to retake this summer, which if he had been given the appropriate accommodations to start with, he would not be in the position to need to retake.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I’d also suggest that you look through the list of juniors retaking the tests this summer and figure out whether any of the rest of them are eligible for 504 Plans and get those set up ASAP. If any of those students don’t pass and end up ineligible to graduate, it will be on your hands.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“McKinley’s teachers will attend an in-service day before the end of April on how the school will be complying with the law next school year and the potential accommodations that they will have to provide students with documented learning differences or disabilities.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The rest of the hour consisted of Mrs. Huntington laying down the law for Miss Pillsbury who looked like she was slowly wilting.

“I expect Sam’s 504 Plan to be faxed to my office by noon on the Monday after spring break.”

“Yes, ma’am. I’ll get to work on it right away.”

The meeting finally came to a close with Sam and Mr. Evans signing more paperwork. Mr. Evans and Sam headed out quickly afterwards to get to work on time. Sam had to drop him off since his dad normally walked to work from their house, but they were a long ways from the restaurant. Sam texted Kurt from his truck while his dad drove.

To Kurt: Ill be ready at 8.30. C U soon.

Kurt smiled and sent back a smiley face.

From Kurt: :) See you soon.

Kurt headed to the shop and got busy working to get as much done as he possibly could. He arrived an hour earlier than usual and Burt had agreed to allow him to skip family dinner so he could work longer to help make up some of the work he should have done on Saturday morning.

He left at 8:25 to drive to Sam’s house. He got there a few minutes late. Sam came out and put his bag in the back and got in. He leaned over the console and kissed Kurt.

“I missed you.”

“Me too. Let’s go eat. I’m starving. I didn’t get lunch because I left school at 10:15 and I haven’t had anything since breakfast.”

Even though they had already eaten, Burt and Carole sat down with Sam and Kurt as they ate.
“This is really good. Thank you.” Sam said.

“It’s delicious,” Kurt said, eating much more enthusiastically than normal.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen you eat like that, Kurt,” Carole teased.

“Ah, well, I didn’t manage to eat much for breakfast because I was so nervous and I didn’t have much time because I had to turn things in before my classes started and I left school and drove straight here with no lunch and nothing to eat since the toast I ate at 7:00 this morning.”

“I see. I didn’t even think about you missing lunch.”

“It’s not your fault. I was too nervous to eat anything anyway.”

“That Mrs. Huntington is a force to be reckoned with, isn’t she?” Burt said.

“She is, sir. You didn’t see her with Miss Pillsbury alone during our meeting with her,” Sam said. “I thought Miss Pillsbury was going to faint.”

Burt laughed. “I bet. I hope she gets all of this straightened out. We’re supposed to check to see whether Dalton has gotten a check from the district the Monday after spring break. Dalton will issue us a refund once they get the check from the district.”

“Then you and Carole can go to Hawaii.”

“That’s the plan. I’m not sure when, but we’ll work on getting it scheduled.”

“What’s the plan with Finn? I need to know when to expect him here.”

“He won’t be here at all when you’re here. He’ll be leaving Sunday afternoon while you’re over in Westerville. And he won’t be back until Saturday by which time you will have gone back to Westerville.”

“Thank you.”

“Well, I hope the week is beneficial to him,” Carole said. “I’m taking him to some of those places you sent me information about. He’s going to see a counselor and a vocational specialist and take some tests and a bunch of stuff. We’re going to stay at a friend of mine’s place who is out of town for part of the week and go to Aunt Eunice’s the other days. So, I’ll miss seeing you, but I hope the whole thing helps Finn get his head on straight. He needs to call it off with both of those girls and find someone else or stay single.”

“I hope the places are helpful. Sam and I will be working a lot of the time anyway. We’ll just be here in the evenings, so even if you were in town we might not see you much depending on your shifts.”

“Burt said you were going to try to work things out with Finn soon.”

“Yeah. I just need to get Regionals out of the way. I’m 90% certain that we won’t win. So, I won’t have much in the way of rehearsals anymore after spring break and I’ll have time to get some materials together and prepare myself to talk to him.”

“Materials?”

“Yeah. He still acts like I’m abnormal and I could just choose to be ‘normal’ if I wanted to. I just want to get some statistics and information from people who have been through conversion therapy voluntarily. About their experiences and some other firsthand accounts of people’s experiences with
being LGBTQ. I’m done being the sole voice of gayness. He doesn’t know anyone besides me. He needs to see that gay people come in all shapes and sizes and have all different tastes in clothing and music and their interests are as varied as straight people. I could wear different clothes, but so could he. Why doesn’t he just choose to wear Docs and button up shirts? Why does he wear those baggy rugby shirts? People make choices, yes. People have personal preferences, but that doesn’t make his choice of a baggy rugby shirt better than my choice of a fitted designer button-up shirt. His choice of baggy jeans is not better than my choice of skinny jeans. But my liking boys isn’t something I can ‘unchoose’ and more than him liking girls is something that he can ‘unchoose’. I’m not the end all and be all of everything gay. He needs to come to terms with the fact that there are more than likely around 50 LGBTQ kids at McKinley are who in the closet because of people like him and the rest of the bullies. Just because he has stopped targeting me doesn’t mean that he has accepted that I’m never going to stop being gay.”

“He pushed me to go back on my word to Kurt last fall. I told him that I made a commitment and in my world that was that. He pushed me to sing with Quinn when he was successful at getting Kurt to break off our duet. He and Rachel threw the competition to force my hand to go to Breadstix with Quinn. It was supposed to just be a friendly meal together and then by the end, she took the gift certificate and put it in her purse and made me pay for our dinners claiming that a gentleman always pays on the first date. I didn’t ask her out. It was all this huge set up. Rachel was determined to keep Quinn away from Finn. Finn was determined to keep Kurt away from me. He made Kurt sound like some kind of creeper, which he absolutely is not.”

“He told me that if he behaved toward a girl the way I had toward him, that the girl would have taken out a restraining order.”

“What?” Carole said.

“That’s what he told me. It was after that conversation that I backed out of the duet.”

“It’s a soap opera, but from my understanding, Finn cheated with Rachel when he still thought Quinn’s baby was his. He and Quinn eventually broke up after he found out that she lied about the baby. While Finn was with Quinn and for a while afterwards, Rachel dated Jesse. And Finn slept with Santana during that time period at some point. When Rachel found that out this fall, she cheated on Finn with Puck in retaliation. To Puck’s credit, she shut her down after some brief kissing. Then Finn broke up with her again and cheated with Quinn on me. And Kurt’s the one with a problem? A guy who’s never done anything behind anyone’s back like that?”

“I never laid a hand on Finn. I never tried to kiss him. I never leaned up against him. The kinds of things that guys do to girls or girls do to guys to flirt – I didn’t do those things. I did, however, give Rachel a bad makeover when she was trying to lure Finn away from Quinn, but only Finn saw the results of the makeover. Anyway, that was all a long time ago, but he is still not comfortable around me. I’m going to put in one more valiant effort to change that, but after that, I’m done. I’m sorry, but I can’t live my life trying to get his approval. I have my future to plan for and my future doesn’t include living in the same house with him for the rest of my life. If he chooses to not like me over something that I cannot change, then that’s on him, not on me. I’m not perfect and I have plenty of faults, but being gay isn’t something for me to be ashamed of and I just want that part of the problem between us dealt with.”

“I understand, honey. Whenever you get those things together, I’d like to read them first okay?”

“Sure.”

“Me too,” Burt added.
“That’s fine. We can even all sit down together if you want. You can read the information to him if you want. Whatever you think is the most likely to get through his thick skull. I want us all to support each other, but if that’s not possible, then I’d like a truce. Peaceful co-existence. No snide remarks about how I turned Sam gay. No comments about how Sam could have any girl so why would he pick a girly boy. None of that.”

“That’s fair,” Carole said.

“Thank you. I can guarantee that one of the first things out of Finn’s mouth when Sam says that he’s gay will be ‘Since when?’ or ‘You can’t be gay – you’re a jock.’ He is absolutely not going to accept that Sam is gay without implying that I did something to Sam to make him gay.”

“And I’m just going to tell him that the only reason I ever dated Quinn was because I was afraid. And he was part of what made me afraid. Karofsky and Azimio – they’re openly confrontational. Bullies like that – I would have just called them on their shit like I did when Karofsky was going after Kurt. But Finn, he wouldn’t even come stand up to Karofsky with us. I mean this was later, but I knew from his very first behavior about singing with Kurt that he wouldn’t be supportive if I came out. I was the new guy. And I was a chicken. I said I would keep my promise to sing with Kurt and I would have. But that doesn’t change the fact that I was too scared to do what I wanted to do which was ask him out back in September when I first saw him.”

Kurt blushed.

“Sorry I was such a chicken.”

“It’s alright. I don’t blame you. I might have stayed in the closet if my closet hadn’t been transparent. McKinley isn’t the kind of place where people come out of perfectly functional closets. Anyway, Finn and I are going to be family for a long time and I will do my best to work things out between us and the three of you are welcome to join me or not, but like I said, this is my last attempt at fixing it. If he refuses, then any further attempts will be his job to initiate in the future.”

“ Seems reasonable to me,” Burt said.

“Thanks for dinner, Carole. Sam and I will clear our places and go up to sleep. I have to leave at 8:15 to drive back to Westerville and I’m going to go in and work for a couple of hours before I go. I don’t know our exact plans yet because we haven’t had time to talk yet, but we will be back Sunday night by 10:30 or 11:00. Sam gets off around 9:00 and then we have to drive back.”

“I’ll be gone by then, but Burt will be here,” Carole said.

Sam and Kurt grabbed their place settings and loaded them into the dishwasher and went upstairs.

“You had seen me before the day you came in the Glee room?” Kurt locked the door behind them.

“Um, yeah. Remember you all sang the song about New York outside? I was there watching you.”

“I was too busy singing and dancing to pay attention to who was sitting around really.” He went in his closet and started undressing.

“I wanted to get up and walk up to you and ask you out. But I was new and you were so cute, I figured you probably already had a boyfriend.” Sam started undressing right where he was standing.

“Oh.” Kurt came out of the closet.
“You had your hair all spiked up and the sunglasses, and then you all did ‘Toxic’. And yeah…” he laughed. “And then I let the guys who bad-mouthed Glee to get to me for a while. And when I finally got up the nerve to come join, you immediately sought me out to sing with me. I tried to play it cool, but you were so cute. I still have all those audio files you sent me. I listen to them all the time.”

“Really?”

“Really.” He stepped into the space right in front of Kurt and kissed him. “And now, you’re mine.” He wrapped his arms around Kurt. “I really am sorry I was such a chicken. We could have been together for the last 6 months.”

Kurt kissed him. “Please stop apologizing. McKinley can be a scary place. I don’t hold it against you. Let’s just be together now, okay?”

“’Kay.”

Kurt grabbed Sam’s clothes and tossed them into the laundry basket with his stuff. “Come on. Let’s shower and snuggle. We still have to figure out our plan for tomorrow.”

Kurt laid out two pairs of pajama pants on his dresser, but left them there and only took the underwear with him to the bathroom.

“”

“No pajamas?” Sam asked when he came out of the bathroom.

“Well, there’s some over there if you want them.” Kurt pointed to the dresser.

“You’re not going to wear any?”

“Not unless you want me to.”

“I’m good. Come get in bed.”

Kurt rubbed the moisturizer in quickly and got up. He turned the music on and the lights off and got in bed.

He rolled over toward Sam and moved Sam’s arm making room for himself up against Sam, who wrapped his arm right back around Kurt after he snuggled up. They were both tired and it didn’t take long before they were both sound asleep.

Kurt’s alarm went off at 5:30 and he scooted over to turn it off and as soon as the noise stopped Sam’s arm wrapped around him like a back hoe and pulled him back to his side.

“Mmm.”

Kurt giggled.

“You’re m’teddy bear. Stay ‘ere,” Sam said sleepily. “Snuggles.”

Kurt turned over in his arms. “You are adorable and very fun to snuggle with, but we have to get up.”
“Five minutes of kisses.” Sam’s eyes were still closed.

Kurt laughed. He crawled on top of Sam and lay down on him. “Five minutes of kisses.” He kissed Sam and pressed in and let his full weight down while propping on his forearms.

“Oh, God.” Sam bucked up as Kurt rolled his hips and pressed into deepen the kiss when Sam opened his mouth. He wrapped his arms around Kurt and got with the flow.

Their “five minutes of kissing” led to a quick shower to be able to get dressed.

Kurt pressed Sam against the back of the bathroom door, kissing him passionately, barely managing to keep himself from pulling Sam’s towel off.

“I think we’re going to need a second shower.” Sam took Kurt’s towel and guided him back into the shower. Ten minutes later, they were both drying off again.

“We have to get dressed this time,” Kurt said as he started kissing Sam again.

“You’re not making that very easy.”

“Neither are you,” Kurt teased back as he ran his hands through Sam’s hair. “Clothes. Breakfast. Work. Regionals.”


“Clothes.” Kurt kissed up Sam’s neck softly.

“Clothes are overrated.” Sam tilted his head to give Kurt better access to his neck.

Kurt ran his hands down Sam’s arms. He reached back and opened the bathroom door. He grabbed Sam’s hands and walked backwards. “We have to get dressed.”

“Mmm hmm.” When they got close to the bed, Sam surprised Kurt when he quickly grabbed him bridal style and tossed him onto the bed. He almost managed to tackle him, but Kurt rolled away quickly and started laughing.

“Now, I am all for this, but not this morning. We can horse around all you want some morning. I have to go work on the books and then drive all the way to Westerville this morning and I really need to eat first.”

“I know. I wasn’t going to do anything else. You’re just so much fun.” Sam moved over and kissed him gently. He stood up and pulled Kurt up and into the closet. “So, something boring to wear to Westerville.” Sam pulled out a solid button up and grabbed a pair of gray slacks. “This?”

“Looks completely Dalton approved.” He took the outfit from Sam and stepped out to the bedroom to put it on.

“Of course, it needs a vest, a brooch, maybe a fedora or a scarf to finish it off, but not today.”

He really was watching me. “You WERE watching me.”

“I told you I was.” He smiled as he pulled a peacock blue Henley over his head. He stepped closer to Kurt and kissed him. He stepped back and grabbed his jeans out of his duffle and put them on. He searched through his duffle. “I forgot to grab black socks.”

Kurt stepped toward the dresser and pulled a drawer open. “Wear a pair of mine.”
“I will have to say one thing that has surprised me is how absolutely open you’ve been about your stuff. You always seemed so particular about all of it.”

“Well, it’s important to me, yeah. But the bitchy attitude is because so many people have made fun of what I like. But you’re more important than any piece of clothing I own and it’s just fabric. I like sharing what’s important to me with people that I care about. I can replace things, if need be. So, don’t freak out while you wear my stuff.”

Sam looked through his drawer and took a solid black pair. “Thanks.”

Kurt kissed him. “You’re welcome.” He looked at the clock.

“I’m sorry you had to get up so early just because Wes decided to call for a mandatory rehearsal before Regionals.”

“It’s alright. I’ll just work on my homework while you do whatever it is that you need to do at the shop. I’ll drop you off at Dalton and drive to where we’re competing. I’ll just go inside and wait for everyone else to get there and get changed once they bring the costumes in.”

“Okay. Since we won’t be arriving together and neither one of us has any idea what this place looks like, how about we meet in the back row of the auditorium on the left, if you’re facing the stage.”

“That will work.”

“I’m going to put a vest and a scarf and a fabulous jacket in your truck to put on afterwards. We’ll go on a date in Columbus where no one knows us and we don’t have to hide later tonight – somewhere near the OSU campus where people will be more tolerant hopefully.”

“Sounds fun. Do you have any button ups that would fit me? I’d like to look a little nicer than this, but we don’t have time to go home and get a different shirt before we head to Westerville.”

“Maybe, but we don’t have time to try clothes on right now either. What are you wearing for the competition?”

“A black button up and a black tie.”

“Just keep the shirt on afterwards and put your jeans and dress shoes back on.”

“That works. I had to buy the shirt myself anyway. So, Mr. Schue can’t make me leave it behind. The pants are the ones we wore last time, the ones I bought last fall. And the ties were in the costume closet.”

“We better get downstairs.”

Sam grabbed his work shirt for the next day from the closet and his bag.

“That everything?”

“Yeah.”

After Sam stepped out of the closet, Kurt stepped in and grabbed a jacket, a vest, and a scarf.

*Perfect.*
Kurt looked through the program as they waited in line to get into their backstage room. Somehow he had missed the fact that Coach Sylvester was the coach or Aural Intensity. *How did I miss that?*

They were singing 5th out of the 6 groups, right after Aural Intensity, with the New Directions going last. They hung their coats up in the room and warmed up a bit and lined up to head to the stage for their practice run. Kurt hung his outfit to wear afterwards instead of a coat because his jacket was in Sam’s truck. When they left the room, Kurt saw Sam in the hallway on the way into the New Directions room. He smiled, but nothing else.

The groups were all back in their rooms at 12:45 for a brief pep talk and then the all headed out to the auditorium to watch the competition. It was a large enough auditorium to allow all of the competing groups to be seated during the whole competition.

Both the New Directions and the Warblers were a bit stunned by the blatant pandering of Aural Intensity’s song selections.

*It’s a good things I nixed "Candles". The ultra-conservative judge and the nun would not have gone for a duet between two boys.*

The Warblers took the stage. Their practicing paid off. They hit their marks, stayed on pitch and in rhythm and their dance steps were a lot more in sync than they had been the weekend before. They high-fived each other as they exited the stage to head back to their seats.

The New Directions were up next. Rachel stepped on stage hesitantly and walked to the microphone stand. She kept looking to her left. Kurt strained to see what she was looking at – Finn. The music started and she began to sing.

Halfway through the song, Kurt leaned into Blaine. “They’re doing original songs.”

Brittany and Tina came out and sang harmony and eventually the rest of the girls came out as well. Once Rachel had finished the ballad, the mic stand was removed and she was handed a face mic. Upbeat music started.

*You may think that I’m a zero.*

*Another original song.* Kurt stood up and screamed. “Woo!”

Finn started singing the second verse.

*Push me up against a locker.*

*Hey, all I do is shake it off.*

*I’ll get you back when I’m your boss.*

This song was about him and the rest of the group. The audience loved it.

*They’ve won.*

As the group as the lined up across the front of the stage at the end of the song, Quinn was at the end on the left looking down the row at ... Finn side-hugging Rachel center stage.

*The tug of war has started again.*

The New Directions filed off the stage and back to their seats during the deliberation. The three finalists were called to the stage. The placement was announced: Aural Intensity in third, the Warblers in second, and the New Directions had won.
They filed back to their room. Wes quieted everyone down. “I want to thank all of you for your hard work this past week. Kurt was right to warn us last fall. The New Directions are a force to be respected. Writing original music for a competition was phenomenal. Those of you who get elected to the council for next year should take heed and prepare more if you want a chance against them. To my knowledge their oldest members are juniors, so they will not be losing any of their team. Again, great job out there today. We did our best. Competing against their band of merry misfits that writes original music was just out of our league.”

Nick, Jeff and Trent approached Kurt. “That second song was about you, wasn’t it?”

“A lot of it. A few of the other members have been bullied as well, but not as much as I was.”

“Will you tell us why you really came to Dalton?” Trent asked.

“After spring break we can talk.” Kurt grabbed his clothes and went into the attached restroom and changed quickly. He came back out once he was dressed. While he was hanging his uniform on the hanger his clothes had been on, his phone rang.

“Hey, kiddo. We don’t see you anywhere. We’re waiting in the lobby. We want to take you out to a late lunch before we head back to Lima.”

“Sure, Dad. I’ll be out in a minute. I changed my clothes.” He finished hanging his uniform and headed out to the lobby.

Kurt walked over to where Burt and Carole were standing in the lobby. There were still people milling around, but the school buses were heading out of the parking lot.

“Sam’s waiting for me in the auditorium,” Kurt said.

“We wondered where he was,” Carole said. “Go get him and we’re going to go a Chinese buffet that I found nearby. It has good reviews, so hopefully it’s decent.”

Kurt nodded. “Sounds good. Did you come in your car or Dad’s truck?”

“My car. I’ll pull down near the exit where you can see us.”

“Okay. I’ll grab Sam and we’ll follow you.”

Kurt slipped his vest and jacket on before he hopped in the truck. He put his scarf on as they followed Carole and Burt to the restaurant. Once he got everything on right, he started talking.

“You guys did a great job. You deserved to win. I had no idea you were doing original songs.”

“I thought the Warblers were great and that you were going to beat us. You managed to kick their butts into some serious dancing. And the backflips? Somewhere along the way, I missed the memo that you can do gymnastics.” Sam wiggled his eyebrows.

“Well, I was a Cheerio. You knew that. Or I thought you did.”

“Yeah. I watched ‘4 Minutes’ and you were just dancing and singing.”

“Watch the Nationals routine.”
“I’ll do that.” He reached for Kurt’s hand. “I wish we could have tied again. I know how badly you wanted to go to New York.”

Kurt nodded. “Yeah, I really did. But you guys were great.”

“Thanks.”

“She turned already. She said it was close, but it’s REALLY close.”

Sam followed her into the restaurant lot.

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Kurt and Sam went through the buffet, sat down, and started to eat.

“It’s delicious. Good find, Carole,” Kurt said after he took a few bites.

“The Warblers were really good, Kurt. Their dancing was better than the New Directions. I wasn’t quite sure why the New Directions won.”

“Thanks. They won because those were original songs. The group wrote them.”

“I wish both groups could have won,” Carole said.

“Yeah, but it doesn’t work that way. I don’t want to spoil our lunch, but I’m not going to get to see you for a while, so I’m going to go ahead and tell you. The battle for Finn started again on that stage today.”

“What do you mean?” Carole asked.

“That song that Rachel sang. She wrote it about Finn. When she kept looking to the side of the stage when she was singing, that’s where Finn was standing. I could just barely see him from where I was sitting. And at the end, Quinn was down on the left end of the row and Rachel and Finn were standing together in the center. It looked like a regular side hug as part of the line, but Rachel won’t have taken it that way. Quinn sure didn’t from the look on her face. She’ll double-down her efforts for a while and when she gets overbearing, Finn will step back a bit to catch a breather and Rachel will be there to be understanding and friendly shoulder to lean on, and he’ll fall for her again.”

“Oh, no. I’m done with that. Those girls are just being mean. I have every intention of being supportive of the person either of you two choose for yourselves, but I don’t feel like he is choosing anymore from what you’ve said, Kurt.”

“I wish I was wrong.”

“I’ll work on dealing with it. What are your plans for the rest of the weekend?”

“Well, we were thinking of going into Columbus for a while before we go back to Dalton. Sam has a ton of homework to do and he’s going to use my laptop to do it. I have a bunch of reading to do for a big paper I have to write for English. So, it will be a rousing evening of studying for us. Tomorrow Sam works from 1-9. I’m just going to ride around with him while he delivers pizzas because the building closes at noon tomorrow. It reopens next Saturday at 9am. We’ll head back to Lima after he finishes work.”

“Alright,” Burt said.

“We’ll be as quiet as we can when we come in. We have to go right to sleep because we both work
“I’ll leave a lunch packed for both of you to grab since there’s no way you’re going to have time to do that.”

“Thanks, Carole.”

“You’re welcome, honey. I’ll have the fridge and freezer stocked. You two can cook when you get back in the evenings and pack lunches then too.”

“We will, thank you.”

“I know this is asking to change the plan, but can you bring Finn back Friday afternoon? I think I’d like to try to work things out before I leave again, but I’m not sure yet.”

“I’ll call or text you Thursday. If you think you’re ready, I’ll bring him back Friday before you get off from work and I’ll make a nice dinner for all of us.”

“Thanks. I have to get everything organized.”

Sam and Burt talked about sports for a while. Eventually everyone had eaten their fill and they said their goodbyes.

“Thanks again for bringing us here,” Kurt said as they walked toward Sam’s truck.

“You’re welcome, kiddo. I’ll see you two Monday I suppose since I’ll be asleep when you get in tomorrow night.”

Sam and Kurt waved and got in the truck.

“I don’t think I’ll be hungry for a long time,” Sam said.

“Me neither. Maybe we can find some place that has a cover band or an indie band playing somewhere near campus and just go listen to some music?” Kurt pulled his phone out. “There’s a coffee shop with an indie band tonight near the OSU campus. Want to try that?”

“Will you be mad if I say ‘no’?”

“No. It was just an idea. My heart isn’t set on going or anything.”

“I was just thinking about how I still have to turn in all of this week’s work by Monday morning. None of the teachers said I had spring break for extra time. I guess I’ll have to email them my stuff. I should have asked, but with the meeting yesterday and Regionals today, it just didn’t pop into my head.”

“That’s fine as long as you have all of their email addresses. Even if they don’t check them over break, they’ll be able to see the time stamps and know that you sent them in before 8:00 on Monday.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine. I told you that my first goal on the weekends was to make sure you stayed caught up in school so you wouldn’t have to repeat this semester. I knew going into this that weekends weren’t going to be free time. Plus, we already ate, which was the point of going out originally.”

“Alright, then let’s head to Dalton and get those assignments done. My books are in my backpack
stuffed under your seat.”

“You should teach high school math. Seriously. I know you have no interest, but you have the ability to make it make sense. I just sit there sometimes and wonder if Mr. Ling is even speaking English. Not because he has an accent, because he doesn’t, but because I just don’t hear anything that makes sense coming out of his mouth.”

“I’ve heard that from other people. He seems like he’d be better off sitting somewhere and doing math for some scientist or something rather than standing in a classroom attempting to explain it.”

“That’s it for the math.” Sam used a sports announcer’s voice. “Next up – US History. More reading, more worksheets.”

Kurt laughed. “Alright. Hand me the book and let’s get comfortable on the bed, but not too comfortable. We’ll lean against the long wall so we can’t stretch out and fall asleep.”

A few hours later, they had both reached their limit on schoolwork.

“I’m done. We’ll have to start again in the morning,” Sam said.

“Okay. Let me see the list so I can make sure we divide the time up in a way that gets everything done. We still have to scan all of your handwritten stuff before we leave at noon.”

“I think we can do it, but let’s try to get one last history worksheet finished since you already listened to me read the section that the worksheet covers.”

“Okay.”

Kurt grabbed his laptop and they made it through the questions as quickly as possible. He shut everything down while Sam stacked his books on Kurt’s desk.

They headed to the shower and got right in bed and fell asleep snuggled up together.

They did schoolwork all morning, and Sam worked his shift. Now, they had made it back to Lima, exhausted. Kurt opened the front door as quietly as he could. He locked it behind them. They headed straight for the shower, which was purely functional and quick because they had to get back up in fewer hours than they both preferred to sleep in a night.

“Double-check your list and your outgoing emails. Make sure everything is there. I don’t want any problems with your arrangement,” Kurt said. He laid out their clothes for the next morning.

“As far as I can see, that’s everything.”

“Excellent.” Kurt turned off the lights, turned the music on and sat down next to Sam in the bed. He took the laptop, shut it down, and put it on his desk. “You’re free.”

“I am.”

Kurt got back in bed and lay facing Sam and kissed him. “I’m glad you’re here.”

“Me too. As much as I thought about this and wondered, it’s even better than I had imagined.”
“You say the sweetest things.”

“It’s true.”

“Thank you. I’m really glad you got up the nerve to ask me.” He wrapped himself around Sam and kissed him again. “As much as I’d like to take this in a different direction, I’m going to be mature about this and turn over and sleep.” He kissed him gently and turned over and scooted back against Sam’s chest. They shifted and got comfortable and went to sleep.

Monday evening Kurt picked Sam up from the gas station and headed home. They got home a lot earlier than either of them was used to, but they went ahead and got dinner started and packed their lunches for the next day. They left a plate of food for Burt in the fridge to warm up and eat whenever he came home.

As soon as Kurt had shut and locked the bedroom door, Sam scooped him up and tossed him on the bed and climbed on top of him on his hands and knees and started tickling Kurt.

“Why are you tickling me?” Kurt barely managed to get out between laughing.

“Seemed like a fun way to start off the evening before I steal your clothes and entice you into the shower with me.”

“Mmm.” Kurt reached up and wrapped his hands around the back of Sam’s head and ran his fingers through his hair and pulled him down into a searing kiss. “Convincing me won’t take much effort on your part.”

“Is that so?” Sam reached down and undid Kurt’s pants.

“Here let me help you.” Kurt teased and slid his pants down over his hips. As he finished, he grabbed the bottom of Sam’s shirt and whipped it up over his head, got the upper hand at that point and flipped them pulling Sam’s shirt off the rest of the way before pressing him into the bed and kissing him again.

“You’re a ninja.”

“You haven’t seen anything yet.”

“Is that a promise?”

“Yes.” Kurt reached down and undid Sam’s pants. Sam reached down to slide his jeans down.

Kurt squirmed out of his pants the rest of the way and straddled Sam still pinning him to the bed.

“Sexy bed wrestling. This is, by far, my favorite sport,” Sam teased.

“Mine too,” he said as he pulled his own shirt off.

_Oh, my God. I love having a boyfriend. This is so much fun._

He lay down on Sam and started kissing up the side of his neck again. He paused below his ear, then whispered, “Do you want to finish this here or in the shower?”

“Both?”
Both it is, then. Kurt laughed and licked his ear and rolled his hips again and Sam bucked up.

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A half hour later, they came out of the bathroom in towels. Kurt opened his underwear drawer and handed Sam a pair of emerald green boxer briefs.

Sam gave him a quizzical look.

“If I’m going to provide the entertainment by putting on a fashion show for you, you get to wear these for me to admire while I model for you.”

“I can do that.” He took the underwear and put them on. He put his towel back in the bathroom and came back out. He fluffed the pillows and put them upright against the head of the bed and leaned back waiting for his show to begin.

Kurt came out of the closet wearing only the underwear he had put on. “I don’t know where to start. What do you want me to model for you?”

“I don’t honestly know. I didn’t really think you’d do it when I first suggested it. Mmm. How about the bondage wear you said you have?”

“Okay.”

Kurt was gone for a few minutes and came back wearing a black shirt with some type of brooch at the neck under a white coat with mini locks and lots of buckles and a pair of black tight fitting pants with straps and buckles on them.

“Nice. I like that. Very unusual. Come closer.” He examined Kurt. “Oh, those are keys, not a brooch. To unlock the locks, I’m assuming.”

“Yes.”

“It’s fun, but I wouldn’t tie you up in it or anything, just in case you’re wondering.”

“Thank you. I don’t think I could do it willingly. And if you forced me, I’d lose my trust in you.”

“I would never force you to do anything. You know that, right?”

“Yeah.” He kissed Sam gently. “Want to help me unlock it and get it off?”

“Sure.”

Kurt hung the outfit back in the closet and stepped back out. “You saw the utility kilt already. Oh, I know.” Kurt stepped back into his closet and put on the jeans and one of the Henley’s he had worn the year before during his brief butch period. He put on the vest and stepped out.

“Um. You look like you put my clothes on.”

“More or less. It was one of the things I wore last year the week I tried to be more masculine. Come over here.”

Sam scooted forward to the edge of the bed. Kurt took the vest off and laid it on the bed. He slipped the Henley off and put it over Sam’s head. He stuck his arms through and pulled it on the rest of the way.
“It looks much better on you.”

“I kind of liked it on you. It would be good for just lounging around. It’s soft and cozy.”

“I never wear the jeans.” Kurt slipped them off and handed them to Sam, who put them on and stood up.

“They fit. What do you think?”

“They look fine. They’re yours if you want. I mean you can just leave them in my closet if you want and then if you ever want to change or need to when you’re here, you can put them on. Try the vest.”

Sam slipped it on and zipped it up. He stepped around Kurt so he could see in the mirror on Kurt’s dresser. “I like it. It’s nice.”

“Consider it yours. You can wear it sometimes instead of your letter jacket this spring and next fall.”

“Thanks.”

Kurt kissed him. “You’re welcome. I probably have several pairs of shoes you can have if you want them. We wore red Chucks when we very first started Glee, but the red is just not me. I wear the black ones sometimes, but you’re welcome to the red ones if you want them.” Kurt went in his closet and pulled them off the shelf and handed them to Sam.

“You’re sure?”

“Yeah. They’ve only been worn on the stage at school, so they’re practically brand new.”

Sam grabbed a pair of socks from his duffle and put them on and then tried the Chucks on. “They fit. I’ll take them. The shoes I got when school started are getting a little ragged and there hasn’t been any money for new shoes in quite a while. These will be great.”

“Come show me what else you want me to model for you.”

Sam took the vest off and handed it back to Kurt to hang up. He took the clothes back off as well and put the shirt back on the hanger it was on. Kurt folded the jeans and put them back in a stack on the shelf.

“You know what?”

“Hmm?”

“Let’s just cancel the fashion show itself and when you get dressed and I’m here, maybe I can just look through your clothes and pick something for you to build an outfit around.”

“That works.”

“We’ve had a crazy few days packed with things we had to do. Let’s just relax tonight. We’ve not slept enough the last few nights. How about you turn the lights off and the music on. We’ll just lay and snuggle and talk and kiss a little.”

“That sounds perfect.”
“So Quinn’s babysitting Stevie and Stacie from noon-5. I’ll pick you up when you get off and we’ll head straight to your place so she can leave,” Kurt said as Sam got out of the Navigator.

“That’s the plan. I’ll see you at 5:00.”

Sam reclined his seat when he got in the Navigator.

“Tired?”

“Not exactly – too many trips into the walk in cooler right before you picked me up. Gives me a brain freeze headache sometimes. I’ll be fine in a few minutes.” When they pulled up to Sam’s house, he reached into his pants pocket and pressed the garage remote on his keychain and Kurt pulled into the garage and Sam closed it back.

“I’m not sure I’m ready for this, but let’s go.” He put the seat back up and opened his door.

They went in through the door from the garage. It only took a matter of seconds before Sam was jumped on by Stacey.

“Sammy’s home!” she jumped up expecting to be caught and spun around, which is exactly what she got.

“Hey, Sam,” Quinn said.

“Did you rugrats behave for Quinn?”

“Yes. We were very good weren’t we, Quinn?” Stacey prodded her.

“They were good.”

“Hi, Kurt. I wondered how Sam had gotten to work since his truck was here.”

Sam put Stacey down. “I want you and Stevie to go upstairs and spend 15 minutes drawing a picture of your favorite thing you did today. I’ll come get you when I’m ready to see it. Ready, set, GO!”

They took off up the stairs.

“Quinn, I want to talk to you before you leave, please.”

“Sure.”

Sam and Kurt sat at the kitchen table. Quinn sat down as well.

“I need you to promise me to keep what I tell you to yourself for now. I know you know some of what’s been going on with us because of rumors spreading around church. And you know my dad went for a job interview today and my mom went with him. That’s why they needed someone to watch Stevie and Stacey.”

“Right.”

“Well, I know you’ve kept quiet about that stuff at school and I appreciate it. There’s something else I want to tell you.”

“What? You’re not sick with something awful are you? I mean I know I was awful about things with
you, but I’m not heartless. Are you sick?”

“No. I’m not sick. Relax. It’s nothing bad.”

“Oh, okay. You’re just so unusually serious.”

“I’m gay.”

“Oh. And you’re dating Kurt.”

“And I’m dating Kurt.”

“That’s not really all that surprising. You were shockingly willing to not press me to have sex with you. And you were very sweet. There was no chemistry. You were a nice person to date – safe and sweet.”

“The same is true for you. You aren’t angry with me are you? I want to come out to everyone on my own terms.”

“I get that. Some of the New Directions will be supportive – others, not so much. You never did anything to hurt me. You were a really decent boyfriend. I’ll keep your secret until you’re ready to share it.”

“Thank you. I’m willing to go along with you pretending that you already knew if you want, so that no one will claim that you’re the one that made me gay or something.”

“Anyone who would believe that is an idiot, which now that I think about it might be half the school. How about when people come to me all worked up about I just act like they’re nuts for caring and give them the ice bitch cold shoulder like their gossip isn’t worth my time?”

“It’s very you, Quinn,” Kurt said.

“Thank you. It takes one to know one,” Quinn said.

“Exactly,” Kurt responded. “So, it’s a ‘Who gives a care?’ that we’re going with as your response?”

“Precisely. What’s it to them if I dated a gay boy? Everyone knows Brittany dated you. Sometimes a nice, good-looking boy who doesn’t try to sex you up is fun to date. We’ll just let them wonder.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I’m sorry about what I did. Finn is like catnip. It’s ridiculous. Rachel’s trying to get him back.”

“I noticed,” Kurt said dryly.

“The school is ridiculously misogynistic. I have no place on the social ladder without a boy at my side. Only the Cheerio girls have some social standing. And since Britt, Santana, and I quit and stayed for the half-time show at the final game, we don’t even have that anymore. Without a popular boyfriend I’m no one. I’m not mad at you Sam. You were new. Rachel pushed us together. I’m not stupid. She wanted Finn to herself and pushing us together let her keep him away from me.”

“Can I be honest, Quinn?” Kurt asked.

“You usually are. Painfully so, usually.”
“You don’t need him.”

“I know. I need to get out of this damn town.”

“Think about this, okay? There’s a dual-enrollment program with OSU Lima or Lima Community College. I’m applying for the program. That way, I’ll only spend half the day at McKinley if I come back. And half of my classes will count for college credit just like they would if I stayed at Dalton.”

“I’ll look into it.”

“You don’t need the high school BS anymore. You can try to keep your claws in Finn, but honestly you’re just leading him on. Let him go and let him find some nice girl that wants to give him the 2.3 kids, the dog, and the white picket fence here in Lima.”

“I should. I know it’s egotistical, but I’m tired of Rachel winning. She is such a harridan. I know, pot calling the kettle black. She wants a Broadway career. That’s all we ever hear from her – how she’s the next Barbra Streisand. Broadway is in New York City, a place, as you just mentioned, that Finn has no interested in living.”

“You both need to let him go. He is a clueless cute football player, but he is a real person who isn’t likely to be part of either of your lives after May of 2012 when we all graduate.”

“I know. I really do. I’m stuck. My mom finally took me back, but she still wants the celibate, Prom Queen perfect, beautiful daughter she imagined I would be – following in her footsteps.”

“I’m sorry. Maybe she could be okay if you excelled in some other way? Like the dual-enrollment program. Like she could brag to everyone about how you’re just in high school but you’re taking college classes or something?”

“I don’t know, Kurt. I’m tired. I’ve tried being perfect. It’s exhausting.”

“Been there, done that. All while pretending that the kids at school weren’t beating the crap out of me or dunking my head in the toilets repeatedly. I tried to play the perfectly straight son who didn’t cause my dad to have to worry at all. He had lost my mom and I tried to fill her shoes. I cooked, I cleaned, I made straight A’s. I did everything he said. But I’m not that straight boy. I’m far from perfect, even though I hide that to the best of my ability. Letting people see my weaknesses just gives them other ways to torment me. And now every day, all day long, I pretend to be a prep school boy. I know that living a life that doesn’t allow you to be yourself is exhausting.”

“I hadn’t thought about what it’s like there for you. Do you ever get to wear your own clothes?”

“On the way in or out of the building and inside my own room.”

“Oh, wow.”

“Look, I wasn’t trying to get sympathy. I just wanted you to know that you’re not the only person trying to be something someone else expects you to be. I appreciate you not outing Sam. If you want to talk, you have my number. Just think about what I said about Finn. Considering setting him free. Even if Rachel grabs him and sticks her claws in him, at least you will have given him a chance to be himself.”

“I’ll think about what you said. I’m glad you and Sam are happy together. You both deserve that.”

“Thanks,” Sam said. He stood up to walk her to the front door.
She got up to follow him.

“Thanks for watching them today. I really appreciate it.” He pulled his wallet out and took out $30 to give her.

“Keep your money, Sam. Go get your guitar back if you can. I know you must miss it.”

He put the money back in his wallet and wiped his eyes. “How did you know?”

“It’s not over by the TV in the family room and it’s not in your room. Sorry I was nosy when it wasn’t down there. The TV in here is missing. Your gaming system is gone. Your brother’s computer is gone. Your family’s been selling stuff. What I did to you was wrong. I should have been honest with you. You may be gay, but you never hurt me. You kept your word. Consider this my apology. I’ll even give you the money to get your guitar back, if you don’t have enough.”

“Thanks. Really. Please don’t tell anyone.”

“I won’t. I know how vicious our fellow classmates are. You’re going to be the receiving end of plenty of hate when you come out. I hope he’s worth it.”

“He is.”

“Good.”

“Good night, Quinn.” He opened the door and he watched her go out to her car and get in. He waved. She smiled and waved back.

Sam walked back into the kitchen. Kurt stood and hugged him and gave him a quick kiss. “I know that was hard. She took it well. I don’t think she’s going to be a bitch about it.”

“She’s not. Let’s go see the pictures they drew before they find a way to get themselves in trouble.”

Kurt followed Sam up the stairs. They were in Stevie’s room drawing. Sam knocked, and then opened the door.

“So, let me see your drawings.”

Stevie and Stacey showed him and told him all about how Quinn had played hide and seek and beauty shop.

“Doesn’t my hair look beautiful?”

“It does. Quinn did a really good job. The braid looks like a crown.”

“It is. She said it’s a princess braid.”

“I think she’s right.”

“She’s really good at hiding. She can fit in smaller spaces than I thought she’d be able to,” Stevie said.

“She’s a cheerleader,” Kurt said. “She’s very flexible.”

“Kurt used to be a cheerleader,” Sam said.
“Really?” Stevie asked.

“Really.”

“Can you do flips like Quinn?” Stacey asked.

“I can.”

“Cool. I bet that would come in really handy if you wanted to study karate or something,” Stevie said.

“It probably would.”

“Kurt and I are going to go figure out what to make for dinner and get it started. You can watch TV in the family room if you want to, but no fighting about what to watch. If you don’t want to watch the same thing, we’ll draw numbers and you can take turns.”

“Okay.”

That night in Sam’s bed, they were going over their plan for the next day.

“So, my parents said that they’ll be back around 9:30 in the morning because my mom has to be at work at 10:00 like usual. So, do you still want to take them to your house and have your dad watch them or do you want to just stay here and just wait until my parents get back before you go into work?”

“My dad actually got chocolate chip waffles and chocolate milk for them and he rented a movie for them to watch. He’s all set to go. I’m not going to spoil his fun.”

Sam laughed. “Alright. We’ll take them to your house on our way to work. Let’s get to sleep. At least we just have to put clothes and shoes on them and put them in the Navigator.”

“Sit between us in the back seat, Sammy,” Stacey pleaded.

Sam crawled into the middle and Stevie got in next. Sam pressed the garage door opener and Kurt backed out, and Sam closed the door. They headed to the Hummel’s. Kurt pressed the garage door opener on his visor and he drove into the garage. Burt was standing there waiting.

“Out, you monkeys. Be good for Mr. Hummel. Mom and Dad will be here in a couple of hours.” Sam just stayed where he was.

“Okay, Sammy.” They hopped out and followed Burt inside. Kurt pulled back out of the garage and headed to the gas station to drop Sam off and then to the shop to get busy with his long list of repairs.

Sam made a quick pot of soup when they got back to the Hummel’s. Kurt grabbed their laundry and got it started. He came out of the laundry room and wrapped his arms around Sam. “Mmm.”

Sam held him close. “I need to ask you a favor.”

“Anything.”
“I want my guitar back. I only have until tomorrow or it goes out on the floor to be sold Saturday morning. I need to go get it as soon as I get off. The shop closes at 6:00 on Fridays.”

“Alright. What’s the favor part?”

“I need to borrow half of the money to get it out.”

“Okay.”

“I thought I’d lost it completely because my parents told me to pay Quinn yesterday and I missed all my tips when I had to ask off on Saturday. My original plan had been to use the tips from this past weekend to pay it out, but that was before I remembered that it was Regionals. Quinn noticed my guitar and a bunch of other things were gone from the house. She refused to let me pay her and told me to use the money to get my guitar back if I could.”

“Maturity is melting her ice bitch heart.”

“Funny.”

“She knows it’s true.”

“I know. Anyway, I thought about it a lot today and I really want to get it back. I miss it a lot more than I miss my Playstation or my laptop.”

“We’ll go get it. You can pay me back sometime in the future, if you feel like you have to, but you don’t need to. I know you would do the same for me, if you could, without expecting repayment.” Kurt kissed him. “Nothing in a relationship is even. If we’re together for any period of time, someone will have used more gas. Someone will have cooked more meals. Someone will have washed more clothes. I’m not interested in keeping a running tab. I’ll do things. You’ll do things. We’ll both do things. I can do this for you now. Thank you for telling me. I know that it’s hard to open up.” Kurt kissed him gently. “We’ll go as soon as you get off. I’ll be at the gas station at exactly 5:00.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

“I sent all the articles to Carole this morning. Hopefully things will go smoothly with Finn. I want to put this nonsense behind us.”

“I’m still afraid to tell him.”

“And that’s okay. You don’t have to. You can wait up in my room while the four of us talk, if you’d rather. I’m not pushing you to come out. Not to Finn, not to anyone.”

“I know. I’ll keep thinking about it.”

They just stood there holding each other for a while. The washer beeped.

“I bet the soup is done. I’ll go switch the clothes to the dryer, and then I’ll go get my dad.”

Sam ladled the soup into bowls and carried them to the table. He grabbed spoons and napkins when he came back into the kitchen and took them back with him.

Kurt and Burt came in and sat down. They ate and talked.

“Thank you for watching the rugrats this morning.”
“We had a good time.”

“I haven’t talked to my dad yet. I need to call and see how the interview went once he gets home for work later.”

“He said they have a showing set for this weekend already. Your mom went home to clean from top to bottom.”

“That’s quick.”

“Your house is in a desirable neighborhood and people start to look this time of year. A lot of people want to move right as school lets out.”

“I see. We moved in the week before school started. I actually figured that I wouldn’t get to play football because I hadn’t been here for football camp, but when I got here, Coach Beiste had just been hired and she told the whole team they were cut and there would be new tryouts.”

“She’s something, I’ll tell ya. But she’s turned the football team around. Kurt won their only game last year. I didn’t even bother to go to the games the year before because they were so bad.”

“I’ve heard how bad they used to be.”

“So, are we still planning this talk tomorrow? I read all that stuff you emailed me. No wonder you were afraid to tell me. I should have made it easier on you. I had known forever, but I thought it was better to let you come to me. I should have bridged the gap a little better. But I’m glad you told me and didn’t keep it to yourself for longer. I did a lot of things wrong, but I tried – and I know you know that.”

“I do. And I appreciate that. If you hadn’t, I don’t think I would have survived.”

“I thought Finn had moved past all this crap.”

“It’s hard when everyone else tells him something different than I do. All of his friends make jokes about ‘catching the gay’ or me ‘turning’ people like I’m some kind of werewolf. Finn’s not the brightest crayon in the box and I get that it’s hard to believe one person over a large group of people, especially when those people have parents who believe the same thing. These kids’ parents told them lies, but kids naturally think their parents are truthful. It’s just how kids are. It’s not until we grow up that we realize that parents lie all the time. Not in mean horrible ways. But parents lie every day about how there are no more cookies, how kids will never grow tall if they don’t eat green vegetables, and a myriad of other things. And the parents who don’t actively teach that gay people choose to be gay and they’re going to hell, those parents don’t actively teach the opposite. They just say nothing. And silence implies consent a lot of times. If someone says something and no one says anything to oppose the statement, it’s assumed that everyone agrees.”

“Save your speech for Finn,” Burt laughed.

“Right. Sorry. It just gets old and Sam is just getting ready to face the onslaught of horrible hatred. It breaks my heart.”

“Kurt already tried to call it off to protect me. I refused. I know what’s going to happen. It will happen no matter when I decide to tell people. Haters are everywhere. There may be an extra large concentration of them here, but barring moving to a gay colony somewhere, we’re going to face hate our whole lives until society changes. And it won’t change if I just sit back and hide in my closet. I’m going to be 18 in six weeks. I need to figure how to come out. I want to be with Kurt.”
“Well, your parents know and they seem fine with it.”

“They are. I told them nearly 4 years ago.”

“So, it’s just the school that’s a big deal.”

“Yes, sir. Latent homophobia like Finn and anti-gay behavior like Azimio are both huge problems. It’s depressing to think about. It’s depressing to think that the fact that I found someone that I care about who cares about me actually angers people.”

“I know, Sam. I know. It’s been a long road of Kurt hiding the truth from me to protect me. He has a protective streak a mile wide, so it doesn’t surprise me one bit that he set you free the first time and that he gave you an out this time. I don’t know how much he’s told you. I don’t know how much of what happened I actually know. But none of it was right. It’s hard as a parent to know that people hate the person you love the most for no legitimate reason. Anyway, we need to table this until tomorrow when it can possibly help Finn see things in a different light. You boys go have some fun. You’ve spent your whole vacation working. Try to enjoy yourselves a little at least. I’m going to go watch TV in my room. You two can go down to the family room of you want.”

“Thanks, Dad. I need to grab our laundry first. We’ll probably shower and change into our pajamas before we head down.”

“I’ll get these dishes. You two cooked.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

Sam headed up to their room and called his mom. Kurt folded and hung up the laundry before going back upstairs.
An hour later, the two of them were sitting on the couch in the family room. They clicked through choices on Netflix.

“You’re not really in the mood for a movie, are you?” I’m not.

“Not really. I have a lot on my mind to try to focus on a plot. Let’s just watch a DVD that I’ve seen a ton of times and I’m sure you’ve seen a ton of times.”

“Toy Story?”

“The Little Mermaid?”

Kurt got up, walked over to the shelf and closed his eyes and randomly picked. “Beauty and the Beast, it is.” He opened the case and put it in. He turned the lights off and sat down in Sam’s lap straddling his legs. He kissed Sam gently. “What I really want is just to hold you.”

“I’m sure that can be arranged,” he kissed him. “How do you want to hold me? Like this or do you want to lie down?”

“Let’s just lie down facing each other.” Kurt stood up and let Sam lie down with his back against the back of the couch. Kurt turned the volume down, and then lay down facing Sam.

“All of this is like a fairytale for me. But I feel like I need to ask you a few things before we get in any deeper than we already are. I’ve talked about how Finn, Quinn, and Rachel have diverging paths after graduation. Is there something you have your heart set on that I should know? I don’t want to be someone who holds you back from your dream.”

“I guess I’ve not put as much thought into it as I should have by now. But there’s been a lot of changes and then only a few months of peace before more upheaval began. I honestly figured I’d go to college some place in Tennessee growing up. It was just there in the back of my mind, nothing specific. I like Tennessee. It’s more temperate. People are more caring in general at least from my experience. Maybe Lima’s just not a good representation of Ohio.”

“I wouldn’t know, not ever having lived anywhere else.”

“Then we moved here. I guess I never bothered to update my thoughts on college. But living here would make going to school in Tennessee a whole lot more expensive than it would have been if I had continued to live there. Now, I’m faced with what I learned on the phone.”

“Oh, I didn’t realize that you had called already.”

“Yeah, I called my mom while you were working on the laundry. She said the job offer is too good to turn down. My dad would go back to making what he was making before and she can get a job easily. They’re going to keep us in school until the end of the year if at all possible, and they’re hoping to sell the house soon. My dad will get a place there and they’ll move our furniture there once the house sells. The job starts in two weeks.”

“So, you’re leaving at the end of the school year.”
“No. I’m not going with them. I’m not starting over at a third high school. Mrs. Huntington is working to make McKinley provide some help and I don’t want to go to Kentucky.”

“What will you do then?”

“I’m not sure. But I’ll be 18. I can stay here and go to school without them living here.”

“Are you sure that’s what you want?”

“I’m sure that being in Kentucky is what I don’t want. I’m working on figuring out what it is that I DO want.”

“Okay. The other thing I wanted to ask is you mentioned church. Is that really important to you? This fall after the New York song in the courtyard, but before you joined Glee, my dad had a heart attack from a heart arrhythmia and was in a coma. Everyone in Glee push their beliefs on me. Mercedes took me to church with her. They organized a prayer vigil with candles in a hospital room with oxygen tanks in it. But the big thing about it was that they went against my wishes. What they did in private was up to them and I wouldn’t ask them to give up their private practices, but they were very vocal and absolutely unwilling to allow me to be an atheist.”

“Oh.”

“I’ve had people tell me I was going to burn in hell long before I even really understood what it was they were so upset with me about. Religious people have told me I should just kill myself now since there was no hope for my redemption and the world would be a better place without me in it. I know that not every religious person is awful. But I’m not interested in participating in their belief system. If attending church is important to you, I can be okay with that, but I can’t be okay if you believe that I’ll burn in hell if I don’t go with you or believe the same as you. If you think that my lack of faith is going to be a problem, I’d rather know now.”

“Growing up where I did, our church was like our extended family. If my mom got sick, ladies from church would show up with dinner for all of us. If my brother or sister was too sick to go to school, someone from church would come stay with them so my mom wouldn’t miss work. She would do the same for other people. If our car needed fixed, someone from church would do what they could or refer us to someone who would charge a fair price. It was like that for everything. Leaking pipes, broken water heater, you name it. The church was this huge family. So, it was super important. But after we moved here, it wasn’t like that. The people at the church my parents chose here are decent enough, I suppose, but they’re not at all like the people we went to church with in Tennessee. If they were, what happened with our house would have never happened. Everyone would have chipped in the first month my dad didn’t get paid and they would have paid our mortgage and that’s if he had stayed unemployed long enough to need the money. Someone would have known someone who had a job he could do until he found a new one. We only moved here because it was supposedly a step up the ladder in the company he worked for.”

“You haven’t really answered my question.”

“It’s back to that same answer. If you had asked me a year ago where I was going to college, I would have said in Tennessee. If you had asked me how important church was, I would have said extremely important. But things are different now. Do I still believe? I guess. I never really considered whether I believed or didn’t. It was part of the culture. It’s sort of like being asked if you believe in February. How do you believe in something that just IS? God, and believing, they just WERE when I was growing up. But now, it’s not like that. I guess I believe because I don’t NOT believe. What is the answer when there is no answer? Does it matter to me that you don’t believe? No. Do I want you to believe? I don’t have an answer to that because I can’t actually say whether I
do or don’t believe.”

“Alright. So, if I attempt to summarize. You do not consider yourself to be an active believer, nor do you consider yourself to be an atheist. So, perhaps at this point, you consider yourself agnostic since you don’t have strong feelings one way or the other and you have no proof that either side is more correct than the other.”

“That seems to fit how I feel. So, yes, at this point, I’m agnostic. And I have no inclination to persuade you to be anything besides an atheist, if that’s how you feel about the topic.”

“Okay. You’re the only person to feel that way. Quinn got very upset, as did Mercedes. Everyone joined forces against me. And all of those things you said about the church you went to, none of them were true for any of the people who so vehemently insisted that God is real and that I should believe in him. Other than attempting to proselytize me, including Mercedes taking me to church, none of them did anything. I stayed in our old house alone while my dad was in the coma. No one came to visit. No one brought food. No one asked me how I was doing. Now, some of them did ask how my dad was doing, which was nice. But my dad had people taking care of him around the clock. No one cared to see if I needed anything. If they were really serious about converting me, acting the way the people in your church acted would have gone a lot farther to convincing me that they were right.”

“If I had grown up here, in the church my parents attend now, my view on the church would be completely different. I know what it CAN be, which is amazing. And I also know what it IS here. Now that I am older, I think that what it is most places is what it’s like here. I think that in generations past that it was more like it was for us in Tennessee. We were in an old, country region. Old ways were passed down. Families had lived there a long time. Anyway, I’m not going to attempt to convert you or attempt to shame you into believing. I guess the biggest thing would be that if you and I are still together in the future, and we live somewhere like I lived in Tennessee, would you let those people be part of our lives?”

“If they don’t condemn us to hell for loving each other, sure. The same pastor that buried my mother and gave her eulogy extolling her virtues and assuring everyone there that she was no longer suffering and that she was in a better place told me that I would burn in hell when he saw me at the mall one day. He probably didn’t recognize me because obviously people change a lot physically between age 8 and age 16. But that cut like a knife. He condemned me to be eternally separated from my mother when he didn’t know a thing about me other than making a snap judgment based on the way I was dressed. He’s the same type of man who would give the same type of eulogy for Azimio if he died in a car wreck. ‘He’s in a place of peace and love now’, even though Azimio’s been nothing but awful to a lot of people for the last 4 or more years of his life. But I’ll burn in hell because I’m attracted to men.”

Sam just held Kurt and listened.

“So, I tried. I really tried to like girls. I didn’t succeed. So, from everything I can piece together God just wants me miserable, lonely, and unhappy. God makes it so that his followers hate me and when I try to be like they say I have to be – meaning straight – I’m miserable. The whole thing sucks because I’m either lonely and alone my whole life banking on the fact that I’ll spend eternity in heaven. Or I find someone I can love while I live my life here and then I burn in hell for all eternity. Either way, I can’t win for losing.”

“Well, not every church teaches that gay people will go to hell automatically. But I don’t want to argue this topic because as we just concluded, I am agnostic. I am not going to begin attending church regularly. I might go if my parents asked me to, just like I would go to something else if they
asked me to, out of politeness. But if and when I get married, it doesn’t need to be in a church. The ceremony doesn’t need to be performed by a minister of any sort. Has this answered your question?”

“Yes. You don’t have a big secret dream that I might be keeping you from. You’re not going to Kentucky with your family. And you don’t mind that I am an atheist.”

“All correct statements.”

“Thank you for answering me.”

“You’re welcome. I understand your concerns about those topics. I do have one question in return.”

“Alright.”

“Is there a big secret dream that I might keep you from attempting to achieve?”

“Not really. It’s not a big secret. I would love to perform, just like Rachel, but I know that it’s more of a fantasy for me than a dream like it is for her. A lot of people achieve their dreams, but very few can make a fantasy real. I don’t pass as straight and I’m a countertenor with a high speaking voice. And while I know that voice training could help me learn to lower my voice for a role, continually straining my vocal chords to speak in a more masculine way would tax them. There aren’t really many roles for guys like me. I’d be lucky to get a ‘best gay’ role in some up and coming musical or maybe cast in the chorus with heavy makeup, in costume.”

“Don’t be so hard on yourself. Your voice is amazing.”

“It is. I do like my voice, but it doesn’t fit the expectations for the leading man in a musical. No one will even consider rescoring an entire musical to write it in a range so that the singing is more suitably matched to my speaking voice. It doesn’t mean I could never get a good role, it just means that there aren’t many roles that suit me, making my overall prospective of success as a stage performer fairly low compared to Rachel who can belt within the typical range for a female in musicals and she can play the role of anyone from 15-30 well.”

“So, you want to be a stage performer, like on Broadway, but within the existing musicals, there are very few roles that you’re suited for. So are you saying that you don’t see yourself pursuing that line of work or are you saying that you do still want to do it, but you’re prepared to not get many roles and you’ll have to work doing something else to pay your bills?”

“That’s exactly what I am in the middle of trying to figure out. Do I pursue it knowing that I’m likely to fail, but go at it prepared to support myself financially in some other way or do I just give up the idea altogether and find another occupation that I can both enjoy and succeed at?”

“Tough choice. But you’re farther along than I am. I don’t really know what I want to do at all. That’s not entirely true. But it’s similar to yours, but even less doable. I’d love to be a potter – a clay artist. But there’s very little hope in being a potter and making a good living. I could study something in addition to pottery that would pay the bills like being an art teacher and then make pottery in my spare time. Or do I choose something more practical that I could enjoy doing while making ends meet.”

“I’m going to ask one last very long term question. Do you want kids?”

“My answer to that right now is no. I like kids a lot. I wouldn’t mind working with them, thus the previously mentioned possible career as a teacher. I would love to be the fun uncle. The person that gets to spend time with the kids, but then the kids go back home with their parents. Like when Stevie gets old enough to have kids in like 10-15 years. I could totally see 30 year old me watching his
preschool son while he and his wife go out or have a nice night in and their son stays at my place with me. Is this our deal breaker? Do you want to adopt five kids?"

“No, my answer is a lot like yours. I like kids just fine. I would willingly spend time with kids. I like your brother and sister. I think though that due to my own life circumstances, I’d rather not embark on that journey. I’d rather be the favorite uncle who listens to the kid when he needs to talk and his dad is too busy putting their water heater back together to listen right then.”

“So you think you’ll be the favorite uncle, huh?” He kissed Kurt.

Kurt kissed him back and kissed him with all the hope that Sam’s answers had given him. *Maybe we can defy the odds and make it. I’m falling fast and hard. I don’t know how to stop or if I even want to slow myself down.* “Well, I DO know how to do the princess braids and how to throw ninja stars,” he teased.

“Oh. I see. I’ll have to step up my skills to keep ahead in the favorite uncle competition.”

He pulled Kurt closer and they just lay there for a while, the movie still playing in the background. Sam was the first to speak again. “Why all the super serious questions?”

*I’m falling in love with you.* “I wanted to know because I guess I wanted to see if we have any hope of this not just being some high school thing that ends next May or June. As much as I don’t want to be alone, I think it would be worse to be told at graduation – ‘This was fun while it lasted, bye.’ I’m asking because I know myself well enough to know that I’m not a player. I’m not even sure I’m a serial monogamist. I’m more of the ‘look for someone and stay with that person’ kind of guy – like my dad. My mom and dad dated for about 6 months before he asked her to marry him, and they got married a couple of months later. After she died, he didn’t date again until Carole. And they dated for less than two months before he asked her to move in. There were issues with Finn and they paused the moving in together, but they kept dating. They got married after dating for 7 or 8 months.”

*I hope I’m not scaring him away.* Kurt took a deep breath. “I know we haven’t even been dating that long, and I don’t even know exactly why, but I felt so comfortable with you so quickly that it’s confusing to me because I don’t usually let anyone close to me at all. People I’ve known for years know less about me than you do. I just don’t want to be some toss-away high school fling. Honestly, I’m just scared.”

Sam kissed him on the forehead.

“I guess with my previous two crushes, there was this distance between us, like even if one of them had been interested, it might have been okay for those to be high school romances, where I just had someone to watch a movie with or whatever. But I absolutely did not really think I’d find someone that I could let my guard down with.”

“I get that. You’ve been very isolated here and you’ve kept everyone just close enough to be friendly, but never really close enough to be really close friends. You are very distrustful of people. I’m imagining that you have stories of being burned when you opened up to people when you were a kid.”

“Yeah. And I know that once you come out, that you will be bombarded with negativity from all sides. I’m scared that I’m not enough – that being with me isn’t worth all that.” *Am I enough?*

“I’ve been here 7 months. We’ve been dating three weeks. You have quickly become my best friend. You know more about me than anyone besides my parents and that’s just because I’ve lived with them my whole life. You aren’t an experiment. I’m not going to turn tail and run because some
homophobes hassle me. I am gay. Dating you or not dating you will not change the fact that I am gay. Now, of course, I could stay in the closet and none of them would know. I understand your concerns. I’ll be hassled because I made the mistake of trying to date a girl. If I had never dated Quinn, my preferences wouldn’t be called into question the way they will now. I’ll be accused of leading her on. I’ll be ostracized even more, and so will you, because those ignoramuses are going to think their stupid belief that it’s ‘catching’ is true. They’ll act like you ‘infected’ me, and they’ll hassle you even more and they’ll avoid me like the plague. You’re at more risk of being hurt than I am because they’re going to blame you. I don’t want that either. I don’t want to live a lie though. McKinley has to change their bullying policy or Mrs. Huntington is going to bring a group lawsuit from what you said. Things have to change. If they don’t, I’ll ask for an out-of-district placement as well. If I come out, and they bully me, that will be the first thing I’ll do. She said there’s a private school that specializes in dyslexia. I’ll ask to be sent there.”

“But that would mean changing schools again and you said that’s why you don’t want to go to Kentucky with your family.”

“I don’t want to change schools again. But if I’m bullied at McKinley, I’d choose staying where we can be together over going to Kentucky and losing you.” He buried his face in Kurt’s neck. “You’re not the only one who wants this to work. Quinn was that type of relationship you’re talking about. It was a ‘this is for high school’ relationship. She and I both knew that. I never gave the idea of staying with her any real consideration. I never felt about anyone the way I feel about you.”

“The way I feel about you.” Kurt’s heart soared. He kept listening, like Sam had done for him.

“I came in. I observed. The football team ruled the school. I’m a dork. I’m a geek. I’m dyslexic. I was new and hoping to stay off the bottom of the food chain. Coach Beiste made everyone try out again and that gave me a chance to escape ‘bottom feeder’ status. First I caved and chickened out on joining even after auditioning for Finn and the other Glee guys because of how the football players talked about the guys in Glee. Even though the school seems to hold Finn in high regard socially, being in Glee knocked him from top man on the team. The only reason they listened to him at all was because of Coach Beiste. But anyway, I was in a new town, new school, alone. I was trying to fit in. I wasn’t thinking about anything long-term. I was thinking about surviving high school. But you were always there. I’d see you in the halls. Then I joined finally joined Glee, and Quinn and I ended up singing together and then dating. And even though I did my best to be ‘Quinn’s boyfriend’, the role was just one I was playing. The possibility never really existed that I would actually fall for her and there would be something between us, but I dated her anyway. It seemed better than being alone.”

“I can understand that.”

“Since we’re laying all of our cards on the table – I really like you a lot. I can see myself falling for you fast, maybe too fast, but I already know what I don’t want and I know what I do want – and that’s you – us. My parents are like what you described as well. My parents met young, got married, and have been together for like 20 years. Neither one of them has ever had an affair. They’re people of their word. I am too. I won’t cheat on you. I am happy with you. I don’t see that changing, but if it did, if it came to the point where we just couldn’t make it work, I would tell you. I wouldn’t go behind your back and see someone else. That’s just not me.”

“I appreciate that. I would do the same, although I hope never to be in that position.”

“So…”

So, I think I love you. “So?”
“So, are those all of the hard questions for this evening?” He smiled and kissed Kurt.

“I think so.” Other than the really hard one of how long do I have wait to tell you that I love you.

“Okay. If you think of more, just ask. I do have one other thing to tell you. When I was at work, I got a text from my boss in Westerville. This weekend is my last weekend. I gave him my two-week notice on Sunday, but he said he already found someone to replace me. He left me on the schedule for this weekend, but then that’s it.”

“That should give you enough time to do your homework at a more reasonable pace on the weekends. And cut down on your driving.”

“And make me miss spending the weekends with you in Westerville.”

He wants to spend the weekends with me. “We can still spend the weekends together here. I come home every Friday evening. Usually I go back on Saturday afternoon, but I can change that. I can stay here until Sunday evening or even Monday morning since I’m more of a morning person.”

“You’d do that?”

“To spend time with you, yes. Definitely. Let’s go upstairs. We’re obviously not watching the movie since it ended already.” Kurt got up and used the remote to turn everything off and eject the movie. He put it in the case and back on the shelf.

Sam stood up and put his hands on Kurt’s hips and kissed the back of his neck. “Okay. Back upstairs. We should just go to sleep. We have a long day tomorrow.”

“Snuggles and kisses first?”

“Of course.” He kept his hands on Kurt’s hips and they went upstairs.

The bell jingled as Kurt opened the door and held it for Sam to walk through. Sam walked up to the counter and pulled his wallet out and handed the claim ticket to the guy standing behind the counter.

“Mr. Evans, I thought you had decided to let me keep it.”

“Nah, I love it too much to let it go.” Sam handed him the $60 to reclaim it.

The man opened a book, looked the transaction up and stapled Sam’s claim ticket into the book and marked it. He put the $60 in the register and gave Sam a receipt showing the loan had been repaid.

“I’ll be right back with it.” A few minutes later, the guy returned with Sam’s guitar, which brought a huge smile to Sam’s face. He opened the case just to make sure that it was actually his guitar inside the case.

“Thanks.”

The guy just nodded and went back to what he had been doing.

Kurt opened the door again and held it open for Sam, who managed to make it to the Navigator before the tears fell. He opened the back door and put his guitar in and then got in the passenger seat.

“Thanks, Kurt. I’ll pay you the other $30 this weekend.”
“I’m not in a rush.”

“No, it’s fine. I don’t have to give my parents my tips this weekend. They had enough to get everything straightened out. When I get my paycheck next Friday, I get to keep that too. I’ll feel like I’ve won the lottery. I’ll have like $250 that’s all mine. I haven’t kept a single dollar from what I’ve made since I got the job like three months ago, except for putting gas in my truck. Oh yeah, and Mr. Schue made me buy the black shirt for Regionals. I’ll be able to take you out on a real date. I want to take you to Breadstix.”

“Why?”

“Because that’s what I wanted to do after the duet. I was going to tell you that I liked you and I wanted us to date. I know it’s dumb, but it’s like this do-over for when I chickened out.”

“Alright. We’ll go sometime. Maybe next weekend, maybe some other time. We’ll talk about it. First we have to go home and face Finn.”

“I’ve decided that I’m going to tell him. If he outs me, he outs me. You said that your parents have some serious deterrents in place to prevent him from doing it.”

“They do. But I want you to be sure.”

“I’m sure. I told Quinn earlier this week. I’ll tell Finn tonight. In time, I’ll tell everyone.”

“Okay.”

A few minutes later, they pulled into the driveway.

Sam took a deep breath and let it out. “Let’s do this.”

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Dinner was on the table when they walked in the door. They washed their hands and took a seat at the table.

“Hey, Sam. Long time, no see. I didn’t know you’d be here.”

“Hey, Finn.”

The food was passed around and everyone started to eat.

Carole cleared her throat.

“Oh, yeah. I wanted to say that I’m glad you told my mom about those places. I was mad at first because I like missed out on spring break here and hanging out. But I learned a lot this week and I actually feel a lot better about myself now.”

“That’s good,” Kurt said. “I’m glad it was helpful. The counselor I see at school gave me the names of the places. At Dalton, I have to take this class that teaches all of that stuff as part of the class. We have to take all these different personality tests and aptitude tests and do a ton of research about careers and colleges in a seminar, but McKinley doesn’t offer anything like that.”

“They should. They just tell us ‘take these classes’ and then never help us figure out what we want to study or do when we graduate. All they ever really talk about is going to college after we graduate, but they don’t even tell us how to get in.”
“I know. That’s why I hoped this week of counseling and stuff would help you.”

“Well, it did. And I read all that stuff you sent Mom and I talked to the counselor about it today. I didn’t tell Mom that, but I did. It seemed so far-fetched. I’m sorry, but it did. And when I showed it to the counselor, he acted like all of it was common knowledge. Like everyone knew all that stuff. I argued at first. He just flat out told me I was wrong. And he told me that whoever had said otherwise was either stupid or lying on purpose.”

“What ‘stuff’ are you referring to in particular?” Kurt asked.

“Oh, the stuff about how many people are gay and how many gay people commit suicide and how many gay kids’ families kick them out. All of it.”

“Oh. Yeah. All of that is true. Just because I am the only gay kid you know at McKinley, doesn’t mean I’m the only gay kid there. The rest just don’t share that information.”

“Yes, the guy said that in a school the size of McKinley, there are probably 50 gay kids.”

“That seems a reasonable estimate.”

“So, the other 49, they’re just hiding?”

“Yes, Finn. They’re hiding and hoping to not get found out.”

He nodded and stuffed his mouth full.

“Given the way people around here treat me, most of them are probably afraid. Think about it the opposite way.”

“What do you mean?”

“Think about this. What if being homosexual was the common way to be. What if only 5-10% of the population was straight. What if being straight got you swirlies, dumpster dives, beaten up, made fun of, and all of the things you know have happened to me?”

“That would be weird.”

“Fine. But still – think about it. If being yourself caused those things to happen to you, would you still date a girl? Especially knowing that the girl could be tormented even worse than you because she’s physically smaller and an easier target? Would you date Quinn knowing that one or both of you could be beaten up just because you like each other?”

“That’s a hard question to answer.”

“I know. And an even harder one is this – would you intentionally seek out a guy to date to keep your cover intact? Could you physically make yourself kiss me just to keep someone from figuring out that you’re straight?”

“Uh, no offense, but yuck.”

“Well, there is your answer about what it was like for me to date Brittany. No offense, but yuck. She’s a nice girl, but she’s a girl.”

“Can you do something to suddenly make yourself find guys attractive?”

“Um, no. Why would I want to?”
“Not my point Finn. It’s not a matter of choice – that’s my point. I can’t just flip a switch and suddenly find girls attractive. And I have the same smartass answer. Why would I want to? Guys are hot. I like guys. I like their physical attributes just as much as you like boobs, which do absolutely nothing for me.”

“I get it. I get it. Stop talking about boobs and attributes or whatever.”

“Finn, we are months from being adults. Grow up.”

“Fine. You made your point. You like guys and you enjoy liking guys.”

“Exactly. So, you’ve realized that it’s not a choice, right?”

“Yeah.”

“And you’ve realized that no amount of kissing or having sex with girls is going to make me find them sexually attractive.”

“God, Kurt stop being so… so…”

“I told you – we aren’t babies. You like having sex with girls. I’m assuming that at some point, I’ll like having sex with guys. That’s the way it works. Straight guys are attracted to girls. Gay guys are attracted to guys. Nothing changes that. You can bring the entire Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition modeling team in here and stand them around and it will do absolutely nothing for me sexually.”

“I GET IT, Kurt.”

“Okay. Just making sure. Because in the past, you’ve been pretty solid in your stance that I could just get over it and be ‘normal’.”

“I don’t think that anymore.”

“Good. I would also like an apology about what you said to me in the fall.”

“In the fall? That was ages ago. What did I say?”

“That I deserved a restraining order.”

“Oh.”

“Tell them that I didn’t do anything to you that would even come close to being 1/10th of the amount of flirting that Rachel, Quinn, Santana, and Brittany have done with you.”

Finn sat there.

“Did I ever touch you anywhere?”

“No.”

“Proposition you?”

“Umm…”

“Did I ask you to do anything sexual with me?”

“Oh. No, definitely not.”
“Tell me one thing I did that would have made you uncomfortable IF I had been a girl. Did I do anything that you would have not wanted me to do if I were a cute girl instead of a guy?”

Finn sat there thinking. “I guess not.”

“Then what you were bothered by was the fact that I was a guy and I liked you. You weren’t actually bothered by the actions themselves, but by the fact that the actions were being done by a guy.”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“That’s homophobia, Finn.”

“No. I’m not afraid of gay people.”

“Finn,” Carole stepped in. “Homophobia doesn’t mean being terrified of gay people in the way people generally use the word like all those big words with phobia at the end like arachnophobia, which is a debilitating fear of spiders. People who are homophobic treat gay people differently than they treat straight people. So, someone who won’t give a person a job because the person is gay, is a homophobic person. Someone who won’t rent an apartment to gay people because they’re gay is homophobic. People who do mean things to gay people JUST because they’re GAY are homophobic.”

“Oh.”

“So, when you said that I deserved a restraining order, that was being homophobic if you wouldn’t have said the same thing about a girl doing what I had done. And for the sake of clearing the air, please tell our parents what I did.”

“Umm. You talked to me a lot, standing close. You kept staring at me from across the room when we were in class. You offered to help me with my schoolwork. You helped me with my singing. You helped me get dressed up to go to dinner with Quinn. You suggested that horrible song that I sang.”

“Finn, you asked me to find you a song.”

“Right.”

“That’s it?” Burt asked.

“Well, that awful way he redecorated the basement.”

“Granted. I went about that all wrong, but it wasn’t done in meanness or gayness. I based it on an old movie I like that stars STRAIGHT men. Obviously, I should have consulted the Sears catalog in the teen guy section rather than base the decorations on an old movie – my fault entirely. But instead of having a cow about it, you could have just pointed out the error of my ways and said that it wasn’t what you were envisioning. You know when I came to you with the swatch board, you could have been cooperative instead of useless.”

“I didn’t even know what it was.”

“Which gave you the perfect opportunity TO ASK.”

“I know.”
“So, you admit that I didn’t actually do anything stalker-ish. I didn’t do anything sexually explicit. I didn’t do anything immoral. I didn’t do anything other than be a guy that had an unwanted crush on you.”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“What would you do if a girl had an unwanted crush on you? Would you accept her help with your schoolwork? Would you let her help you with your singing? Would you have invited her over to help you pick out an outfit?”

“No.”

Carole spoke up again. “Finn, you may not realize it, but by letting Kurt do those things for you, you were leading him on in a way.”

“What do you mean?”

“If you let a girl who had a crush on your do those things, what would she have thought?”

“Oh. That I liked her back.”

“Exactly, Finn. You gave me hope. You gave me the slimmest bit of hope that you might actually like me back. It was dumb on my part, but you were my first crush.”

“I get it. I gave you the impression that I liked you back. When I was just trying to be nice and not be homophobic.”

“Right. You were nice to me. And as lame as that is, that’s really all it took for me to develop a crush on you. You were the ONLY guy at school who was being even the tiniest bit nice. You held my expensive jacket and satchel while the rest of the jocks dumpster tossed me.”

“What?” Carole asked.

“He’s right. I held his jacket and bag.”

“Not hating me was equated with being nice in my messed up mind.”

“Yeah. I guess I get it. If every girl I had ever met had said awful things to me and had done terrible things to me and then one girl was even a tiny bit nice, I’d probably get a crush on her too.”

“Thank you for understanding. And I want you to be 100% sure of the fact that the crush was over a year ago. I have zero interest in dating you.”

“Okay.”

“So, are we good? No more thinking I have some kind of crush on you? I see you as my brother now. That’s it.”

“Got it.”

“Next thing I want to point out – I do not want to be a girl. I am a guy. I like being a guy.”

“Why did you always hang out with the girls then?”

Sam spoke up for the first time. “Finn, use the brain you were born with. Why would someone who has been routinely been bullied by boys hang out with girls?”
“Oh. Because they didn’t dumpster toss you.”

“Exactly. They didn’t treat me like I had the plague.”

“But you wore skirts to school.”

“That’s true. Why does the way the fabric is cut on my clothes make me a particular gender?”

“Huh?”

“What do men in the Middle East wear?”

“I have no idea.”

Sam spoke again, “Think, Finn. Didn’t you take World History? What did the men in the pictures
from places like Egypt and places in Africa have on?”

“Oh, those dresses with the belts tied around the waist.”

“So, did those ‘dresses’ as you called them make them women?”

“No.”

“Then me wearing a skirt or kilt, does not make me a girl or imply that I want to BE a girl.”

“Why do you want to dress like a girl then?”

“I just like the clothes, Finn. Why do you wear a variation on the same shirt every day? Striped polo
or striped rugby and jeans. Why don’t you wear something more interesting?”

“I like my clothes.”

“I like MY clothes.”

“But your clothes are weird.”

“What’s that to you? You’re not wearing them. Why do you care?”

Carole spoke up. “He has a point, Finn. What does it matter how he dresses?”

“The guys rag me about it.”

“Tell them to mind their own fucking business,” Sam blurted out. He blanched. “Sorry, Burt, sir. I’ll
watch my mouth.”

“Well, in this case, it seems justified,” Burt said. “What Kurt chooses to wear is none of anyone’s
business. As long as he’s not breaking some school dress code, the rest is no one’s business.”

“It’s time to grow up, Finn.” Kurt agreed. “Tell them to fuck off, like Sam suggested.”

“They’ll kick the crap out of me.”

“Welcome to my world,” Kurt said sarcastically. He stood and untucked his shirt and lifted it enough
to show the bruising on his side. “Do you see that, Finn?”

“Yeah. Did you get hurt at the shop or something?”
“That’s from the last locker shove Karofsky gave me.”

“Dude, that was months ago.”

“Honey, come here.” Carole said.

Kurt went and stood next to her. She pulled his shirt back up. “Honey, your ribs were more than likely broken or fractured. Does it still hurt for me to touch the area?” She ran her fingers along his ribs.

“Not really. I looked it up. They don’t wrap fractured ribs anymore. I didn’t want to waste money going to the doctor and having x-rays.”

“Well, you’ll be going to the doctor and the school will get the bill,” she said. “I want proof.”

“Fine. If you insist, I’ll go. Anyway, Finn, I’ve been dealing with getting the crap kicked out of me for – well, since I was about 12. Junior high. Before that, it was just verbal attacks. The elementary school teachers did a better job of keeping the kids from beating me up.”

“I don’t want beat up. I don’t want associated with your weird way of dressing and acting. I don’t want to be a homophobe or whatever, but I don’t want to be singled out and picked on either. I just want to go to school and everything just be normal.”

“And normal for you is that everyone likes you and you’re at the top.”

“I guess so, but when you put it that way, it sounds bad. I’m not trying to be mean or anything. I just want people to leave me alone and like me.”

“I get that. I just want people to leave me alone. Only I’d settle for ‘not hate me’. Liking me seems to be way too much to ask.”

“So wear normal clothes and don’t act so different.”

“Would you tell Tina that?”

“What do you mean?”

“How does Tina dress?”

“Umm. I guess in black dresses mostly.”

“Is that how the other girls dress?”

“Not really.”

“How does Quinn dress?”

“In sweet stuff like pretty, frilly clothes.”

“And Rachel?”

“In animal sweaters, and plaid skirts and knee socks.”

“Are either one of those the way the other girls at school dress?”

“I guess not.”
“And Mercedes?”

“She wears like bright neon stuff. And before you ask, no it’s not really how the other girls dress.”

“So, the girls in Glee all dress differently than the other girls at school?”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“They like to express themselves. So do I and I’m not going to stop because you don’t like it.”

“Great. So, if you ever come back to McKinley you’re going to wear skirts and stuff again.”

“Yep. You can start practicing your smartass answers for Azimio. How about – ‘Fuck off. I’m not going to undress him and redress him before leaves for school.’ Or how about – ‘Fuck off. If I say anything about the way he dresses, my stepdad will ground me.’?”

“What’s with the language, Kurt?” Burt asked.

“Do you really think Finn doesn’t swear in the locker room? You’re delusional if you think that guys in high school keep their language PG in the locker room.”

“He’s right, Burt,” Carole said.

“Anyway, enough of that topic. I can clearly see that you have no intentions of being supportive of me being myself.”

“Kurt, that’s not fair. Just because I don’t want Azimio to come after me doesn’t mean I don’t support you.”

“Finn, it does mean just that,” Carole said.

“Great,” Finn banged his hand on the table. “So I have to agree with you to be supportive?”

“No, you just have to tell people to mind their own business. You don’t have to say – ‘Oh, but the ensemble he has on today is an homage to the Paris 2010 Givenchy line that was first seen on the runway in the Spring 2009 collection in Milan.’”

Sam snorted.

Kurt continued, “You don’t have to say you like my outfit. You don’t have to say anything positive at all. You can just refuse accept people talking shit about me.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Fine. I’ll be right back. I need to go to the bathroom.” Kurt got up. He went in the hallway bathroom and texted Sam.

To Sam: We can end the conversation here. I’ll be back in a minute and I’ll follow your lead.

Sam put his phone back away.

Kurt came back in and sat down.

Sam took a deep breath and started to speak. “I am one of the 49.”

Finn looked at Sam. “What?”
“I am one of the 49 other LGBTQ kids at the school that’s been in hiding.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean I’m gay.”

“Since when?”

Carole just shook her head. “Finn, didn’t you just say that you understood that people didn’t BECOME gay, not more than a half-hour ago.”

“Oh, yeah, yeah, right. You dated Quinn.”

This time Burt spoke up. “Kurt went out with Brittany. What was Kurt just talking about? Some gay guys really try to be straight. Some of them voluntarily go to conversion therapy because they don’t want to be gay. They want some way to make themselves straight. They don’t want to be isolated by society and treated like – like the way Kurt’s been treated and worse. Just because Sam dated Quinn doesn’t mean that he wasn’t gay. Some gay guys just pretend to be straight until they’re older and they come out as adults.”

“So, did you just start liking Kurt?”

“No. I wanted to go out with him from the first time I saw him when you guys did that New York song in the courtyard. I had the hugest crush on him.”

Finn looked shocked.

“What? Dude, Kurt is hot. It’s not my fault that you are straight and can’t see it.”

Burt laughed at him.

Kurt blushed. *He thinks I’m HOT. Oh, wow. And he said it in front of my parents.*

“I WANTED to sing with him. You told me that singing with Kurt would get me killed. And when I wouldn’t back down, you pushed him into backing out and Burt pressured Kurt into backing out as well. I thought he backed out because he figured out that I had a crush on him and he gave me the ‘It’s me, not you’ speech to let me down easy.”

“Oh.”

“Otherwise, I would have kept trying. I wanted to win the duet contest, go to Breadstix, and tell him that I liked him.”

“Oh, wow.”

“It was like this perfect set up.”

“Never mind that. Dude, everyone is going to hassle Quinn when they find out.”

“I already told her. She’s prepared.”

“Why did you date her?”

“Because I thought Kurt didn’t like me. After he backed out of the duet, he avoided me like the plague. What point was there in coming out if the guy I liked didn’t like me back? And Quinn and I dated mostly because you and Rachel pushed me to sing with her, and if I wasn’t going to come out,
then I needed to find a way to blend in. When we went to Breadstix, she decided we were going to date. I just went along with it.”

“So you and Kurt are dating now?”

“Yeah. We have been for almost three weeks.”

“So, you’re like going to be over here a lot then.”

“Yeah.”

“Alright.”

“Remember what we told you, Finn.” Carole said. “What happens if you out Kurt’s boyfriend?”

“My life changes to the stone ages.”

“Pretty much,” Burt said.

“But you told Quinn.”

“He did,” Kurt said. “So, you and Quinn are the only ones at school that know. But I expect you to keep quiet about it to her as well.”

“How?”

_Duh! Does your brain work, Finn?_”

“Finn, think,” Sam said exasperatedly. “If the two of you talk about it, even on the phone or in text messages or whatever, there’s always the chance that someone will hear you or see your messages.”

“So, wait. You’re staying in the closet?”

“For now.”

“And Kurt’s okay with that?” Finn looked at Kurt to gauge his reaction.

“I am. He doesn’t have to discuss his sexuality with people if he chooses not to. Are you comfortable discussing your sexuality publicly?”

Finn looked sheepish with Carole sitting next to him.

“I mean Santana pretty much did it for you, but you seemed pretty pissed about it. And what she said probably boosted your rep. It didn’t tank you to the bottom of the bottom feeders at the school. It was private and she made it public. That didn’t feel good, did it?

Finn shook his head.

“Keep what you know to yourself. Or it will be a Flintstone’s life for you,” Kurt reminded him.

“Got it. Keep my mouth shut even to Quinn.”

“Thank you,” Sam said.

“So, you’ve liked him since back in September?”

“Yep.”
Kurt smiled at Sam’s enthusiastic response. *God, he’s cute.*

“You’re a jock. Doesn’t the way he dresses bother you?”

“Umm. I’ve only seen him in the utility kilt, but he rocked that. He has nice legs.”

Kurt blushed.

Carole laughed. “Finn, now might be a good time to stop asking dumb questions.”

“Right.”

“Since Quinn knows already, does that mean I can have her over for a movie tonight if she doesn’t have plans?”

“Sure,” Carole said. “A soon as we’re done. But first I want you to summarize our discussion.”

“Um. Sam’s gay. Don’t tell anyone. Quinn knows, but don’t talk about it.”


“There are lots of people in the closet at school because they would get bullied and maybe kicked out of their houses.”

“Right.”

“People don’t choose to be gay. And even when people don’t want to be gay and they try not to be gay and they pretend to be straight – they’re still gay. Even kissing girls or having sex with them doesn’t make them straight.”

“Good. And the last thing I want you to keep in mind is that even though what Kurt said is a little too vulgar for me to repeat. He was right. What Kurt does is no one else’s business. And anyone who attempts to try to make you defend his choices or tries to bully you into bullying Kurt – needs to be told to mind their own business.”

“Got it. Can I call Quinn now?”

“Yes, Finn. Sam is staying here. I know that Quinn’s mother will not let her spend the night, so don’t bother asking. But Sam is staying, which is not any of Quinn’s business. Kurt and Sam will go upstairs before she gets here to avoid any issues.”

“Alright.”

Kurt asked, “So, are we okay, Finn? No more weirdness between us? I’m not interested in you. I haven’t been in over a year, and even then it was just a first crush.”

“Got it. No feelings for me. You and Sam are together.”

Sam spoke up, “So, are we okay then too? I know you didn’t want me to hang around with Kurt. You kept us apart on purpose. I realize you didn’t know I was gay, but it was none of your business. What Kurt does and what I do are none of your business unless we are actually doing something really stupid like getting drunk or doing drugs, in which case, please feel free to make us stop.”

Finn laughed. “Yeah. Got it.”

Kurt asked, “Are you going to freak out to see us together? Because if you feel like you are going to,
it’s time to check your latent homophobia. That means examine how you feel about things and remember that if your reaction to something is negative just because we’re gay, then it’s a homophobic reaction.”

“Right.”

“So, if Sam and I are standing in the kitchen kissing and you react negatively to that, you have to ask yourself if you’re reacting negatively because two people are kissing in the kitchen or because two guys are kissing and you can see it. Think about it like this. Mike and Tina. Compare us to Mike and Tina.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean if you walked into the kitchen when all of the Gleeks are here and you saw Mike and Tina kissing, how would you react to that compared to walking in and seeing me and Sam kissing in the kitchen.”

Finn looked like he was thinking.

“And then consider other scenarios. If I were sitting in Sam’s lap in the family room, how would you view that compared to Tina sitting in Mike’s lap? If they could do the exact same thing we are doing in the exact same location, and you’d be okay with their behavior, then you should be okay with us doing the same things.”

Sam continued, “The two of us have been witness to you and Rachel kissing in school. We’ve also seen you and Quinn kissing at school. Mike and Tina kiss at school. Brittany and Artie kiss at school. How are you going to feel seeing me and Kurt kiss?”

“Don’t answer that out loud,” Kurt said quickly. “If your answer isn’t that you would be fine with it, then you need to think about what you’ve learned and figure out how to move what you’ve learned into the part of your brain that controls how you react to things.”

Finn nodded.

Kurt got up. “We’ll clean up. You can call Quinn.”

Sam got up and helped Kurt clear the table, load the dishwasher, and wash the pots and pans. Burt left the room, but Carole followed them to the kitchen and sat at the island and talked to them while they worked on the cleaning.

“The places we went were all actually quite helpful. Please thank your counselor for me.”

“I will. I’m glad they were helpful.”

“It will take time for him to come around.”

“I know. I just wanted to give him something to compare. If he takes the time to stop and think about a direct comparison of his reactions, then maybe it will help change his responses over time. Maybe in time, he’ll be okay with me being who I am.”

“I hope so, honey. I didn’t realize a lot of things. I’m really sorry we didn’t talk about all of this sooner. And I’m calling Monday morning to get you an appointment to have your ribs x-rayed. I want to make sure that your ribs healed properly and I want proof to add to your file in the case against the school.”
“Alright. I wish Mrs. Huntington could force Mr. Schue to sign a statement indicating that he witnessed some of the assaults.”

“He what?”

“He saw it happen. Afterwards once, he offered me a tiny cup of water and told me that he thought I was letting it ‘get to me.’”

“So, he didn’t say anything as an eyewitness back then?”

“Nope. But he did send me to Principal Figgins office a few weeks before that for insubordination. I had to serve detention for more days than Karofsky was expelled for.”

“Insubordination?”

“Yeah. We wanted to sing Britney Spears songs and he kept saying ‘no’ and I got aggravated and told him to ‘stop being so friggin’ uptight.’ He sent me to Figgins, who promptly assigned me to a week’s detention.”

“When was this?”

“The week before my dad ended up in a coma.”

“And the locker shove that did that to your side?”

“Um, that was after that, but before the wedding. Now, that I think about it, the shove that Mr. Schue saw the end of wasn’t the one that I have the bruising from. He saw one after that. He took me to his office and gave me his version of a pep talk, I guess. He said I was letting it get to me when I usually just let it roll off my back. He said I was being belligerent and angry instead. I mouthed back. I told him that he was part of the problem because he let the students get away with homophobic behavior and that his lesson plans were boring and repetitive. Oh, and that McKinley wasn’t challenging. Not my finest moment in the grand scheme of appropriate student behavior. But he walked past the dumpsters when Finn was holding my stuff and the instant he stepped a few feet past the dumpster Puck tossed me in. Mr. Schue had to have heard me landing in the dumpster. He knew what the jocks were doing to me and he did nothing. When I went to Coach Sylvester about Karofsky earlier, Mr. Schue was there and didn’t even back me up. He was like just sitting there when he could have said that he had seen things happen to me. The teachers turn a blind eye. That’s why I don’t think that any plan that Figgins comes up with to present to Mrs. Huntington will actually work. When the teachers won’t prevent students from hurting each other, what hope is there for the school?”

“We could subpoena him or whatever the equivalent would be. We could somehow force him to tell the truth.”

“Well, if you can think of a way, go for it.”

“I’ll work on it.”

Sam said, “We better get upstairs if Quinn is coming over.”

“Thanks for trying to help me with Finn.”

“You’re welcome, honey. I should have done better raising him. I never even knew any of this was going on.”

“I know. If the school offered decent sex education in 9th grade Health, people would know how not
to get pregnant and maybe they’d have the opportunity to learn that people are born gay.”

“And if parents like me had taken the time to look through their kids’ health book and realize that there was nothing but a page about abstinence in it, we could have done a better job teaching our kids about pregnancy prevention ourselves. My lack of knowing is not absolution from the outcome. I need to start a PTA for the high school. We keep assuming our kids are being taught properly, but I’m finding out that we are wrong. A lot of things need to change.”

“I’ll leave you to figure out how to do that.” Kurt stepped forward and Sam followed him up the stairs. “Goodnight.”

Kurt and Sam were still pensive from the confrontation at dinner. Kurt sat down at the vanity and started using a cleanser on his face. Sam sat on the chair nearby.

“Do you think it will make a difference, talking to him tonight?” Sam asked.

“I hope so. If it doesn’t, then it doesn’t. I’ve done what I can. The rest is up to him. How about we shower and then you play your guitar for me.”

“I’ll sound awful, I haven’t really played in nearly two months.”

“I promise I will love it, even if you mess up.”

“Now, who’s being a sweet talker?”

“It’s true. What you do doesn’t have to be perfect for me to like it or enjoy it.”

Sam smiled. “Okay.” He got up and grabbed pajamas for both of them and took them in the bathroom.

They undressed and showered quickly. Afterwards, Sam pulled his guitar out and tuned it. Kurt sat in the middle of his bed facing the headboard where Sam was leaned back thinking of a song to play.

“I heard about the day you originally sang for the guys, but they didn’t include me, as usual. You could sing that.”

Sam started to play. “I wanna be a billionaire so freakin’ bad, and buy all of the things I never had…”

Kurt sat and listened while he sang the whole song.

“I’m not much of a rapper. That day I sang, Artie started rapping before I could get a word out, but he’s much better at it than I am.”

“I like hearing you sing.”

“We should work on a duet, like we both wanted to. I know you had a list. Pick one this week and send it to me and I’ll work on it.”

“We don’t have to sing one from that list anymore. I had a list of non-romantic duets. We could sing any duet now.” He leaned forward and put his hands out and crawled toward Sam and kissed him, and then plopped back to where he was in the middle of the bed.

“That’s true. Maybe we could reclaim the one I sang with Quinn and then I wouldn’t be singing a lie
like I did that day.”

“If you want to.”

“I really do, if that wouldn’t bother you. It was obviously a hard day for both of us. You thought I was straight and I thought you didn’t like me. And we were crushing on each other.” He shook his head. “Crazy, craziness. Sing with me and we’ll make the song true instead of a big lie.”

“I’ll learn it this week and we can sing it together next Friday night, okay? I avoided listening to it whenever possible because of what it reminded me of.”

“I get that. Next Friday, then.”

“Play ‘Loser Like Me’ and sing it for me.”

“I’ll try. It might be more a cappella than guitar.”

“That’s fine.”

Sam started strumming and did his best to sing the whole song for him.

“Your turn to sing for me.”

“What do you want me to sing?”

“Well, I probably don’t know many of your go-to songs. I know ‘Over the Rainbow’ or the opening song that Belle sings or the song Ariel sings about her stuff.”

“‘Over the Rainbow.’”

Sam started strumming and Kurt started to sing.

*Somewhere over the rainbow*

*Way up high*

*There’s a land that I heard of*

*Once in a lullaby*

Sam smiled and continued play along. When the song ended, he started playing “Part of Their World”. Kurt sat and watched him play.

When he finished, Sam laughed. “I’ve got one for you.” He started to play again. He sang imitating Garth Brooks style.

*Blame it all on my roots*

*I showed up in boots*

*And ruined your black tie affair*

*The last one to know*

*The last one to show*

*I was the last one you thought you’d see there.*

*And I saw the surprise*

*And the fear in his eyes*

*When I took his glass of champagne*

*And I toasted you*

*Said honey, we may be through*
But you’ll never hear me complain

Cause I’ve got friends in low places
Where the whisky drowns
And the beer chases my blues away
And I’ll be okay
I’m not big on social graces
Think I’ll slip on down
To the Oasis
Oh, I’ve got friends in low places.

By the time he had gotten to this point in the song, Kurt was smiling so big his face hurt and he was struggling not to laugh out loud. Sam continued on.

I guess I was wrong
I just don’t belong
But then I’ve been there before
Everything’s all right
I’ll just say goodnight
And I’ll show myself to the door

Hey, I didn’t mean
To cause a big scene
Just give me an hour and then
Well, I’ll be as high
As that ivory tower
That you’re livin’ in

Cause I’ve got friends in low places
Where the whisky drowns
And the beer chases my blues away
And I’ll be okay
I’m not big on social graces
Think I’ll slip on down <
To the oasis
Oh, I’ve got friends in low places.

Once he finally finished, Kurt couldn’t hold it in any longer and let his giggles out. “That was amazing. Fantastically perfect. Thank you. I really needed a good laugh.”

“My pleasure,” Sam said, with a big goofy grin on his face. He leaned over the guitar and kissed Kurt.

He put his guitar back in the case and propped it up against the end of the dresser near the closet. He turned off the lights and turned Kurt’s iPod on and got back in bed and snuggled up to Kurt who had already gotten under the covers. He laid his head on Kurt’s chest and Kurt wrapped his arm around him and kissed the top of his head.

How much longer do I have to wait to tell him?
“Sam, sweetie, wake up.” Kurt turned over in Sam’s arms and kissed him. “Come on, Sleeping Beauty, open your eyes.”

“More kisses.” Sam tightened his hold on Kurt, which made Kurt laugh.

“You always ask for more kisses when it’s time to get up.”

“Cause kissing’s more fun than getting up. I can do it in the bed with my eyes closed.”


“Noope.” He put his leg over the top of Kurt’s and kept him from rolling away.

Kurt giggled.

“More. I like snuggles and giggles and kisses in the morning. I only get them two days a week.”

“Well, you’re adorable and impossible to say no to when you ask all sleepy like this.” Kurt relaxed and wrapped his hand behind Sam’s head and ran his fingers through Sam’s hair. He whispered in Sam’s ear. “Plus, I happened to be quite fond of morning snuggles and kisses too.” He kissed down Sam’s neck causing Sam to shiver a little.

“Mmm.”

Kurt continued the kissing down Sam’s shoulder. Kurt managed to get some leverage and rolled Sam onto his back and started kissing down his chest.

“Oh, God, don’t stop.”

Remembering Sam’s reaction when he had licked the palm of his hand, Kurt swiped his tongue across Sam’s bare chest.

Sam bucked up and pulled Kurt down on top of him and connected their lips briefly. “This is going to end this quicker than I’d like if you keep licking me.” He kissed him again.

“Mmm.” Kurt rolled his hips instead.

“Those hips of yours are,”

Kurt prevented him from saying anything else by taking advantage of his opportunity to lick inside Sam’s mouth. There was no more talking and a lot more kissing.

“Your dad’s going to start charging us for the extra water with us showering at night and again the next morning.”

“Nah. He probably thinks it’s me at night and you in the morning.”

“In the shower for that long by ourselves?”
“I’ve been known to take quite long showers.” He kissed Sam and stole his towel and ran out of the bathroom.

Sam came out wearing nothing since they hadn’t taken anything to put on into the bathroom with them. He walked over to his bag like he was going to get a pair of underwear out and then quickly snatched Kurt’s towel while scooping him up and dumping him on the bed. “I can swipe towels too, you know.” He leaned down to kiss Kurt, which gave Kurt the opportunity to flip their positions.

“Exactly my planned outcome.” He started kissing Sam’s neck.

“You are so much fun.” Sam laughed. “You’re going to be the death of me.”

Kurt kissed back up his neck and whispered, “Is that so? Should I stop then?”

“Definitely not.”

“Mmm.” Kurt moved to Sam’s lips. After a few minutes, Kurt pulled back and sat up, still straddling Sam. “I really need to get dressed and so do you.”

Sam propped up on his elbows. “One of these days, we’re going to get to fool around in the morning without having to go to work or do homework.”

“I think that’s on tomorrow’s agenda. You don’t have to be at work until 1:00 and you already turned all of your homework in. So, that give us all morning.”

Sam sat up the rest of the way, so Kurt was basically sitting in his lap. “Something to look forward to.”

“Definitely.” Kurt leaned forward and kissed him. “But for now, we have to get dressed. I need to drop you off at your house and get to work by 8:00.

Sam ran his hand down Kurt’s arms. “You have nice biceps. You’re a lot stronger than I had imagined. You hide all your muscles under your layered clothes.”

“Private muscles,” Kurt teased. “Only you get to see them.”

Sam kissed him again. “Lucky me.”

Kurt took a deep breath and backed up and got off the bed.

Sam pouted.

“Don’t give me that. I don’t want my dad to change the rules because we can’t stop fooling around and I don’t show up on time for work. I like the rules we have now.”

“You’re right. You’re right.” Sam got up and started getting dressed. “He’s being very lenient and we should be mature and be where we’re supposed to be on time. But tomorrow, I may just keep you in the bed until lunch.”

Kurt stepped closer and kissed him quickly as he walked past to get clothes out of the closet, “I’d like that.”

They finished up. Sam grabbed his bag and they stopped in the kitchen long enough to fry some eggs quickly and eat them. Kurt dropped Sam off at his house.

“I’ll see you when you get off tonight. Text me from the parking lot.” He leaned across the console
and kissed Sam before he got out of the Navigator. He grabbed his bag and headed into his house to spend a few hours and have brunch with his family before he headed to Westerville to start his pizza delivery shift.

Kurt headed to the shop and changed into his coveralls and got busy on the list of repairs that he needed to make. He started on the first one, but his mind flashed to that morning and he blushed.

*I can’t believe he finds me so attractive. I never, ever thought anyone would really like the way I look. I thought I’d eventually find someone who tolerated my looks, but appreciated what I could bring to a relationship, like my ability to cook and keep a household running. But Sam actually thinks I’m sexy.*

“Kurt.” Cassius paused and walked closer, thinking that perhaps Kurt had earbuds in. “Kurt.”

Kurt startled and nearly hit his head on the hood of the car he was supposed to be working on. “Yes, Cassius?”

Cassius laughed at him. “What’s his name?”

“I can’t say.”

“Oh, so it IS a guy?”

“Well, of course it’s not a girl. Yes, he’s a guy. It’s just, well, he’s not out to anyone except his parents and mine, mostly. Once he comes out, I’ll bring him around.”

“You do that,” Cassius teased. “And until then, focus and change those spark plugs, please.”

“Right. Right. Sorry!”

“I will.”

Kurt looked at the time.

*I hope things are going well for you, Sam.*

After he’d been home for a couple of hours, Sam called out, “Dad, can you come in the kitchen? I want to talk to you and Mom.”

“Sure, Son.” Dwight moved from the couch to the kitchen table.

Mary was working on making brunch for everyone.

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

Sam took a deep breath. “I’m not moving to Kentucky with you.”

“What do you mean, honey?” Mary asked.

“I don’t want to go to a third high school and start over again. I only have a year of school left. I’m
turning 18 soon and I’m going to stay here to finish high school.”

“How will you live on your own and have time to go to school?”

“I’ll make a way. I’m making nearly $500 a month at the gas station. If I have to, I’ll find a roommate and share an apartment with someone going to OSU Lima or something.”

“You’re serious about this.” Dwight said.

“I am, Dad.”

“Does this have something to do with Kurt? You can’t plan your life around someone you’ve only been dating for less than a month, Son.”

“It’s true that I want to be where he is, but I really just don’t want to be the new kid as a senior, Dad. I started over with no friends when I went to the all-boys school in Tennessee and I started over again here last fall with no friends. I just don’t want to do that again. I already know that I’ll be starting over again to go to college after I graduate. Mrs. Huntington is getting things lined up for me to get help at McKinley. If I change schools again, I might not even be able to graduate next year depending how different the requirements in Kentucky might be. I don’t know. I just… I’m just not going to move to Kentucky. I know you’re disappointed and I’m sorry for disappointing you, but I have to do what’s right for me. Stevie and Stacey are young. They’ll be fine.”

“Honey, this isn’t what we wanted for you. You’ve done nothing but work since the beginning of the year.”

“I know. My grades this semester are terrible. I’m working on it. Kurt had the idea to go to my teachers and ask for partial credit for late work. All of them agreed. They also agreed to let me turn all of my written work in on Monday mornings before class, so I’ve been getting everything done on time with Kurt’s help. He’s actually a really good teacher and he doesn’t act like I’m dumb like a lot of people who were supposed to help me before did. He just explains the information and it makes sense.” Sam had a really sweet smile on his face.

Mary smiled and said, “You love him, don’t you?”

“Yeah. I do. He’s amazing. He’s so different from anyone I’ve ever met. I just feel comfortable with him. I’ve spent so much time trying to be someone I’m not. And he likes me the way I am. It’s a really amazing feeling not to hold everything back all the time. I know that coming out will make my life rough in a lot of ways. But always trying to be someone I’m not is really hard too.”

“We were surprised when you started dating Quinn and then that you stayed with her when you never really talked about her in a way that seemed like the two of you were close,” Mary said.

“Especially after you had told us way back that you were gay.”

“Lima isn’t exactly gay friendly. When I thought Kurt didn’t like me and didn’t want to be my friend, I decided to play straight since that’s what jocks are here. They are straight whether they are or aren’t. And most of them date Cheerios. I did the expected. And then I locked my geekiness up for the most part. My disguise worked well, but I’m tired of living behind the mask.”

“I get that, Son. I guess I figured after you hadn’t come out already, that you had planned on waiting until after graduation.”

“I would have. But for whatever reason, that night I took those pizzas to Dalton – seeing Kurt just opened the floodgates and I told him the truth. And the time I get to spend with him is, like, freeing.
Being myself with someone my own age for the first time in so many years, it’s just amazing.”

“Alright. You’re going to have to come up with a workable plan because just saying you’re staying isn’t going to make it happen.”

“I know. I’ll make it work. And before you get too concerned, I know that you two will take me back. If I stay and things with Kurt crash and burn or things don’t get better at McKinley, I can head to Kentucky if I need to. But I really, really like him and Mom’s right, I’m in love with him. I’m going to put 100% into making it work.”

“I wouldn’t expect any less. You always do your best. Go call Stevie and Stacey in from the backyard so we can eat before you have to head to Westerville. We can talk again tomorrow when you get home from work.”

Sam nodded. “Thanks for listening and not getting angry with me.”

“Of course, Son. You’re nearly a grown man. We knew you’d start to want to take charge of your own life. This is what you want, so it’s up to you to do your best to make it work. And you’re right. If it doesn’t work out, we’ll be there for you.”

Kurt headed home at the end of his shift. He headed straight to the shower and redressed. He packed up what he had brought home with him for the break and put the bag in the Navigator.

After Sam called and told him that he had talked to his parents, Kurt arranged to have an early dinner with Burt alone since Carole would still be at work. He made spaghetti with whole wheat pasta and ground turkey. It was simple and it fit Burt’s dietary guidelines. Once it was done, they sat down in the kitchen at the island and talked.

“Sam’s not going to Kentucky with his family. He’s staying here in Lima. He doesn’t want to start over again at a third high school.”

“I see. How do his parents feel about that?”

“He’s already talked to them. He said they took it well and they aren’t upset. His dad is big on personal responsibility and living up to your potential and being man of your word. They also told him that if it doesn’t work out for some reason, that he can still go to live with them if need be.”

“So, what’s his plan?”

“He doesn’t have one yet. He only found out they were moving two days ago. He turns 18 in May, so legally he won’t need them close by to sign permission slips or things like that anymore. He still has his job at the gas station. He makes about $500 a month there. He’s going to start working on a plan.”

“I’m assuming your going to help him with this plan.”

“Of course.”

“You didn’t persuade him to do this did you?”

“No. He had told me that he didn’t want to go to Kentucky when his dad got the second interview, which was a little over a week ago. At that point, he didn’t want to go. After the job offer was firm, he decided that he wasn’t going to go. I didn’t give him any sort of ultimatum or anything because I
wouldn’t break up with him just because he moved. I’m not that type of person. Kentucky isn’t an
insurmountable distance from here. Where they’re moving is less than a 3-hour drive. He can go visit
them or they can come visit him on the weekends. If he ends up changing his mind, I can still see
him.”

“Alright. I know you really like him.”

“I do. I feel comfortable with him.”

“I’ve noticed. He’s a good kid. I’m glad you’ve found someone you feel like you can be yourself
with.”

“I want to ask you two things.”

“Alright. This spaghetti is good by the way.”

“Thanks, I’m glad you like it. So, the first is – how did you know you were in love with Mom?”

“I figured you’d be asking me that soon. My question back to you is what makes this – what you feel
with Sam – different from how you felt about Finn last year or Blaine earlier this year?”

“It feels completely different. I think back last fall when Sam and I first met, there was the initial
feeling that was similar to how I felt about Finn and Blaine. With Finn, the feeling passed when I
realized that there was no chance of him ever liking me back and then faded completely once I got
over the initial let down. I saw him more realistically and realized that we weren’t a good match.
With Blaine, he flirted with me from the get go. He took my hand and led me through the hallway at
Dalton and then sang to me. Seriously. It was like a fairytale. You’ve seen the inside of the school. I
had been in there about five minutes and boom, there was this cute boy flirting with me. No one had
ever flirted with me. So, there was this rush of excitement. I mean my adrenaline was already in
overdrive from skipping school here, driving there, and sneaking into such a posh place. Then after I
enrolled, he was always trying to help me and he invited me out for coffee all the time. He invited me
to watch movies in his room. Now, granted he never tried to ‘put the moves on me’ – Mercedes
words. But I just thought he was being very gentlemanly. He was quite touchy-feely compared to
any other boys I had ever been around, but only he was only that way with me as far as I could see.
So, I just took that as a sign that he wanted to go very, very slow. Like glacially slow. So, I just
accepted it and assumed we were dating. I liked him. I thought he liked me. He sang flirty duets with
me. I was certain that when he brought a boombox in and asked me to sing ‘Baby It’s Cold Outside’
with him in the Warblers practice room where I was alone studying with a fire going in the fireplace
that the song would end with us kissing in front of the fire.”

“Seems to be a reasonable assumption to me. I mean, I was never a singer, but if I asked a girl to sing
a romantic duet with me alone in a room with a fireplace, I would imagine she would be expecting
something romantic to happen at the end of the song.”

“Right. Because if you’re just looking to sing a fun Christmas song with your friend before
Christmas break, there are about 100 times as many non-romantic Christmas songs as there are
romantic ones.”

“Right.”

“So, with Blaine, I always felt on edge. Like maybe there was something I was supposed to do that I
hadn’t or that I had done something that I shouldn’t have. Or like maybe there was some invisible
timeline to us becoming official that I didn’t know about – you know some prep school way of doing
things. It was always stressful, but I stuck it out because I didn’t really know anything about dating
and I thought he liked me. Eventually I told him and he acted like he had no idea that he had done anything to give me the impression that he liked me. I was shocked obviously. I told you that I took myself out of the equation because I’m not something to be toyed with.”

“Enough about that. How is what you have with Sam different?”

“Well, Sam was honest with me and told me that liked me. I still thought he was cute, even though I had moved him into the ‘can’t have – cute straight jock’ folder in my mind. He was always nice to me. He’s the one that stood up to Karofsky and got clocked for it. And that was when I was pretty much avoiding him because I didn’t want him to get added to the ‘gay by association’ list for the bullies at school to start picking on him. I had backed out of the duet to keep them from thinking he was gay.”

“I knew you liked him back then. But you kept liking him even though you thought you and Blaine were unofficially dating?”

“It’s not like I was fantasizing about him or something, Dad. But yes, I still liked him. Not in a ‘maybe he’ll be my boyfriend someday’ way because I thought he was straight. Aren’t there women you’ve met or seen that you found attractive even though you would have never done anything to pursue them?”

“Of course.”

“How about this. If I had known for certain that Sam was gay, I would have never given Blaine a second look. He could have flirted all he wanted to, but if I had been dating Sam already, I would have kept my interactions with Blaine completely platonic. I would have asked him not to put his hands on my shoulders and if he had taken my hand on the staircase like that, I would have pulled my hand back and said I would follow him to the location he was leading me to.”

“Would you have left McKinley?”

“I’ve thought about that. No, I probably would have stayed. I would have let the Glocks protect me like Puck said they would.”

“Glocks?”

“Glee jocks.”

“Oh,” Burt laughed. “Wanna know what I see?”

“Sure.”

“You and Finn are not a suitable match. That was destined to die the way almost all first crushes do because they happen when the person with the crush is too immature to be in the type of relationship that can weather storms. You just happened to have your first crush older than a lot of guys, but given that you’re gay, that’s not surprising since there weren’t many guys who treated you even remotely decently.”

“Alright.”

“And your crush on Blaine was too lofty. It was like a movie fairy tale. Handsome prince rescues downtrodden prince from another realm. He saw you as someone who needed rescued and you saw him in a completely different light. And you mistook his need to be needed as interest in you romantically. Blaine is very immature. He presents himself so controlled and in control, but inside, he’s an immature teen who doesn’t know much about the world.”
“Alright.”

“Your need for guidance at a new school gave him the feeling of power and a sense of being needed that he doesn’t have in his life.”

“How do you know him well enough to make that type of statement?”

“The truth?”

“Of course.”

“He came to me not long after the drunken night in your bed and told me that I need to have ‘The Talk’ with you or you might end up at a party sometime and not know what you were getting yourself into.”

“Oh, God. It was after the Crawford County Day thing.”

“I don’t know what that means.”

“What it means is irrelevant. It just means that I know when he did that. Is that why you gave me ‘The Talk’?”

“Yes and no. We had the talk because you pointed out that I had been negligent in my role as the father of a gay son. I had never educated myself on what sex would be like between two men. You were right that I couldn’t answer your questions and that bothered me about myself. I wasn’t doing right by you by avoiding learning about something that doesn’t appeal to me or apply to my life. So, I went to the clinic and asked for the pamphlets. I was 99% sure that you already knew the basics when you rolled your eyes at me when I said I didn’t know what went down in the tent. So, the pamphlets were for me and they were a way to bridge the gap between us – for you to see that I had taken you seriously and that I had educated myself. I was also 99% certain that you weren’t going to be in a situation where a guy at a party you’d be at would manage to persuade you to have sex with him due to a lack of knowing that you were having sex. I figured the only way anyone was ever getting you out of your multitude of clothes was if they drugged you, and at that point, knowing how to properly input tab A into slot B wasn’t going to be of any use to you.”

“Very funny, Dad.” Kurt rolled his eyes. “But you’re right. I wouldn’t just let some random naked guy get anywhere close enough to stick tab A anywhere near me unless I was already too incapacitated to know what was going on, which would mean against my will since I don’t drink at parties.”

“So, we had the talk because I wanted you to hear what I had to say about the value of your heart. Yes, men can separate the physical sensation that having sex offers from the emotional connection easier than women can, at least from what everyone seems to say, but honestly I hope that’s not the path you choose. And it’s not because you’re gay that I’m saying that. I would have given you the very same talk if you were straight. I gave Finn the same talk, but with different pamphlets. I want you boys to know that sex can be amazing. But Finn already found out that it’s not nearly as amazing as it can be when the person you’re with is just in it for the physical release.”

“So why did Blaine coming to talk to you about this lead you to believe that he’s immature and in need of someone to need him.”

“That’s not really something I’m going to share with you. We talked for a bit and I’ll just leave it at that.”

“Alright. So, you didn’t want me to date Blaine.”
“I wouldn’t have stopped you – but no. All I could see with him was you eventually being miserable because he was jealous of you.”

“Jealous?”

“It’s hard to explain. There are people who need people to need them. And when the people who have needed them start to not need them so much, they can’t deal with it. And they do things to get the person’s focus back on them. They are jealous of anyone else that the person spends time with.”

“Interesting assessment.”

“So, back to how this thing between you and Sam is different. He doesn’t need you to need him. He doesn’t try to tell you how to be. He genuinely seems to enjoy your company and interacts with a group of people that you’re in without the need to talk over you or take over the conversation, like he’s genuinely interested in hearing what you have to say rather than spending the time formulating how he’s going to make himself the center of attention with the next thing that comes out of his mouth. You came down wearing your kilt the first morning after Sam had spent the night here. You acted like it was absolutely normal for a boy you like to see you barefoot with your hair not fixed, flitting around the kitchen in a kilt and an apron.”

Kurt listened.

“I cannot imagine you allowing Blaine into the house with you only half-dressed, according to your usual standard of being covered from head to toe, and with your hair not fixed. I can see it clearly. If Blaine had rung the bell and stepped inside and you were dressed like you were that morning, you would have been up the stairs and in your room so fast, I would have thought it was the Flash moving through the house. You wouldn’t have come back down until your hair was just right and you had put some pants and socks on and had your shoes or boots in your hand ready to put on.”

“You’re right.”

“When he was around, you were trying to be the person he was grooming you to be.”

“Grooming? That sounds really sinister.”

“I’m not sure of a better word. He was teaching you to be a proper prep school boy. But you saw the wild side trapped inside him when he got drunk. People who repress who they are like that can be dangerous. And they can be controlling and manipulative, especially if they become alcoholics. You have these proper gentlemen who keep all these societal rules and by all appearances are perfect gentlemen and husbands, but you find out 15 years later that they mistreat their wives when they’re drunk and they lose their ability to suppress themselves, and then when they sober up, they somehow convince their wives to stay with them.”

“You see that in Blaine.”

“I see the possibility. He’s young. He has time to mature and but he needs to do it on his own. Right now, I think he sees the world as this very small area that surrounds him. That’s how a kid sees things. I guess time will tell whether he matures or not. Some people never do.”

“Hmm.”

“Finn is in that stage too. Not the repressed personality that comes out when he’s drunk, but the immature stage of only seeing the very small area that surrounds him. He’s used to being at the top of the heap and he needs to be needed as well. He keeps flip flopping back and forth between two girls. This week, I think he started to look beyond the little high school bubble. Time will tell, I guess.
He’s still seeing Quinn as you saw last night when he invited her over. She came over after he called.”

“She’s moved past seeing just inside the bubble. She knows the bubble isn’t going to last, but she’s not ready to let her position at the top of the heap go. Rachel’s got Finn in the sight of her bow, ready to shoot him with cupid arrows again. Do you think me talking to him again, maybe next weekend would do any good? Like maybe what I see now that I’m not so close to the situation anymore?”

“I’ll think about it. It might be better than one of us trying to talk to him. I think Carole should be there with you though to give a female perspective.”

“I’ll think about it and we can decide later in the week. I still think he’s got a long ways to go to get over the homophobia. It’s so ingrained in people here. I know it’s been a struggle for you. Maybe you can talk to him about that from your own life experience. He knows a little because of what you said in the basement bedroom that time. Are you over it completely now? Be honest, please. If you saw me and Sam kiss would it make you cringe in a way that seeing me kiss Brittany didn’t or in a way that would be different than seeing Finn and Rachel or Quinn kiss?”

“Well, I guess we’ll find out if I ever see the two of you kissing, but I don’t think so. I think it will be the same embarrassed dad seeing his kid kissing someone reaction. My head has to catch up to reality. In two months, you’ll be an adult. You’re not my child son anymore – you’re my adult son. Adults do adult things and I have to get over my hump of feeling like you’re a little kid because you’re not. But you will always have his place in my heart as my little boy. Being a dad is tough.”

“I know. You’re doing good, Dad.”

“You said you had two questions. That was only one REALLY long one.”

Kurt laughed. “You’re right. The second one was whether you would consider letting Sam live with us.”

“I’ll need to talk to Carole, but I don’t see an issue with it. When she and Finn thought that Quinn was having Finn’s baby, she opened their home and let Quinn move in. I know this is different, but Sam’s family won’t be here and you’re in love with him.”

“You’re right. I am. It just seems so fast, like maybe I’m just making everything up in my head.”

“I get that. But you and Sam are solid. You’ve already been there for him during something really hard. You agreed to date him when he had nothing but himself to offer you. And he was flunking his classes, which you have helped him with. But you don’t need him to need you. You just like caring for people.”

“So, can you go ask Carole now, so that I can tell Sam when he gets to Dalton tonight after he gets off? She came in from work a while ago.”

“Yeah, I heard the garage door go up. But she knew we were going to talk, so she headed to our bedroom to give me and you some privacy.”

“I’ll clean up the dishes while you go talk to her. There’s enough food left over if she wants some. I packed it away in the fridge.”

About 15 minutes later, both Burt and Carole entered the kitchen. They sat at the island, while Kurt leaned back against the counter. He had nearly finished drying the dishes he had washed.
“Honey, it’s fine with me if Sam moves in. He’ll need to be added to the chores, but his will be minimal during the week since he works until 8:00 each night. I’ll put a plate of food from dinner in the fridge for him. He’ll need to put his plate in the dishwasher and turn it on afterwards. We’ll add his truck to our insurance, but he’ll need to pay for it. We can add his phone to our family plan, but he’ll need to cover the cost of that as well. You’ll need to make room for his stuff in your room.”

“I’m sure he won’t have a problem covering his insurance and phone. I would just about guarantee he will insist on covering the cost of his food as well. That’s something that we can work out before he moves in, if he wants to move in. I haven’t told him anything. I wanted to talk to you two first before I said anything to him. He may want to try to find a roommate and rent an apartment. I don’t know. We didn’t get that far yet. At this point, it’s just wait-and-see about their house selling. Mr. Evans is going to leave in a week I think, but everyone else will stay until the house sells.”

“That’s fine, honey. We know that none of it is written in stone. But you can tell him that he’s welcome to stay with us.”

“Thank you. I’ll tell him tonight when he gets to Dalton.”

“He’s not going to keep that job too is he?” Burt asked.

“No, this is his last weekend. He gave his two-week notice last weekend, but his boss already found a replacement. So, next weekend, I’ll come home and stay all weekend. I only have 8 weeks of school left. I’m just going to keep my nose to the grindstone and keep my straight A’s if I can. I’ll keep tutoring, but it would help if I could just work maybe 6 hours total on the weekends or maybe just Fridays. I’m going to see if I can pick up some more tutoring clients at Dalton to make up the difference in pay. Maybe you could use my four hours on Saturday afternoons to train Finn to rotate tires or something. If Sam and I have to pay for our car insurance and phones, it would make sense that Finn has to pay for his too.”

“We’ll talk about it. He does need to start covering some of the costs because you’re right that it’s not fair that you work and pay for your share and he just horses around and we cover his share.”

“I’ll let you know tomorrow if I can pick up enough clients to cover my lost pay for just working Saturday mornings until school gets out. If Finn doesn’t want to learn, let me know, and I’ll see if Sam does. Thanks for being willing to let Sam live here. I already packed my stuff in the Navigator and I’m going to head out. If I leave now, I won’t have to drive in the dark.”

Carole got up and hugged him. “I’m glad you’ve found someone, honey. He’s a sweetie.”

“He is.”

Burt pulled Kurt into a big hug. “I’m proud of you, kiddo. You’re becoming a man. Nothing makes a dad prouder. We’ll see you Friday night.”

“See ya.” Kurt hugged Carole too and headed out to Westerville.

Sam came bounding up the stairs, two at a time, carrying his duffle. When Kurt opened the door, Sam slid through and wrapped his arms around Kurt in one smooth movement and kissed him. He followed Kurt through the interior door and up to Kurt’s room. Once the door was shut, he put his duffle on Kurt’s dresser and wrapped his arms back around Kurt.

“You’re in a good mood.”
“What’s there to be in a bad mood about?”

“Nothing, I suppose. You’re just very cheerful.”

“Ah, but see, today my wallet is overflowing. I get to keep my tips. It’s a good day.” He kissed Kurt gently and turned back toward his duffle. He unzipped it and pulled out a container of strawberries in a grocery bag. “I bought us something to share.”

“Mmm. Strawberries.”

“That day at your house for breakfast – that was the first time I had eaten any fresh strawberries in months.”

“Let’s wash them in the bathroom. And then we can feed them to each other after we get out of the shower.”

“Mmm. Sounds fun.”

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“These are really good.”

“I agree.” Sam fed Kurt another strawberry.

Kurt fed Sam the last one. “All gone.”

“Boo.”

“We can get some again next weekend. Or we can get something else that sounds good.” Kurt took the container and tossed it into the trashcan.

Kurt crawled up the bed and straddled Sam’s lap and kissed him.

“Having a flexible boyfriend has its benefits. I like it when you sit on my lap.”

“Well, I like facing you when we talk and I’m not ready to lie down yet. So, I’m glad I can sit this way too.” He ran his hands through the back of Sam’s hair. “Your hair is softer when you use my shampoo.” He leaned forward and kissed Sam passionately this time. “I’m really glad you’re here.”

“Me too.”

“My dad and I had a long talk today. And I have something to ask you.”

“What?”

“Will you move in with me?”

“In with you? Like live with you?”

“Yes. You’ll have to do chores, pay for your car insurance and phone after my parents add you to our plans, and that’s it.”

“You’re serious?”

“Of course, I’m serious. I would never tease about something like this. I’ll make room for all of your stuff in my room. Well, of course, we only need one bed. But yours is a twin, so I think we should
“Keep mine, unless of course, you don’t want to sleep with me in my bed.” Kurt kissed him quickly.

“Well, what kind of boyfriend turns down sleeping in the same bed with their gorgeous sexy boyfriend?”

“Hmm. Not me, but I want you to make your own choice.”

“Well, I choose you in your bed.”

“Good. I don’t want you choosing anyone else in any other bed. Just me.”

“Only you.” Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt and pulled him close. “Your parents are really okay with this?”

“When Quinn’s parents threw her out, Carole let her move in with them. Your parents aren’t throwing you out of course, but they’re not going to be here. Yes, they’re serious. I just need to make room for your stuff in my room so that you can move in whenever you need to. Well, I mean you didn’t say yes or no yet. Do you not want to? You can look for an apartment if you’d rather live on your own.”

“And not live with you? That would be crazy. Plus, if I pay for my insurance, my phone, and food, I could save up for after graduation. If I get an apartment now, I won’t be able to save anything. I was thinking about what you said about the dual-enrollment thing. I want to do that too. I know that I’m not as academically advanced as you, but maybe there’s a way I can still do it. I’m going to go talk to Miss Pillsbury about it. It might just be art and music classes or something since I’m running out of art classes to take at McKinley and they don’t offer guitar. I’m going to see what my options are.”

“Alright. So, that’s a yes?”

“Yes. Yes. Yes!” he answered interspersed with kisses.

“I’ll do my best not to drive you crazy.” Kurt laid his head on Sam’s shoulder.

“I’m already crazy about you. I like being with you. You’re not going to drive me crazy, except maybe wanting to kiss you all the time.”

“Well, I like being kissed by you, so, I think that will work out well.” He sat back enough to kiss Sam. “Do you need your parents’ permission or did they give you free choice as to what to do about your living arrangements?”

“They gave me free choice. My dad gave me the ‘You’re a man now.’ speech about being a good man – keeping my word and working hard.”

“Well, do you want to tell them? Or do you just want to lie down and kiss and snuggle?”

“I’ll call them and that way they won’t worry. You can let your parents know too.”

Kurt went in the bathroom so they could both talk on their phones at the same time. Five minutes later, Kurt was back and turned the light off and got in bed with Sam.

“So, those kisses and snuggles?” Sam asked.

“All yours.” Forever, I hope.
The next morning, Kurt did not set an alarm. When he woke up, he saw that it was nearly 8:00, which meant that he wasn’t likely to fall back asleep, even if he tried. He knew Sam was tired though and he tried to hold still, but Sam stirred and started kissing his shoulder, which made Kurt giggle because he was tickling him with how light the kisses were.

“I don’t think I could ever get tired of waking up to snuggles and giggles and kisses.”

Kurt turned over in his arms and kissed him. “And don’t forget the fabulous view.”

“You’re definitely fabulous.” Sam kissed him.

“I was promised a morning in bed. I plan to enjoy every bit of it.” He wrapped his arms around Sam’s neck and played with the back of his hair.

“Well, I intend to follow through with my plan. So, kissing – lots of kissing. And you mentioned the view. I am totally into viewing. I’d love to view every bit of you.”

“ Hmm. I’m pretty sure, you’ve already viewed all of me.” Kurt laughed.

“Can’t hurt to double-check.” Sam ran his hands down Kurt’s back.

“If you want, but I think I’d like a hands-on experience, instead of just viewing you.”

“Oh, would you now?”

“I would. How about a massage?”

“Ooh – I’d like that.”

By 11:00, Kurt and Sam had showered again and gotten dressed to head down to lunch. They both stuffed themselves after their adventuresome breakfast-less morning. The cafeteria was fairly empty since it had just opened and a lot of the students weren’t back yet. Kurt and Sam sat alone and enjoyed their meal together.

After they finished, they headed back up to Kurt’s room so that Sam could grab his bag and head out. They hugged and kissed and said their goodbyes before heading down. Sam waved from his truck and left for his last afternoon of pizza deliveries.

Kurt spent the day working on all of his own schoolwork. He liked that Dalton was so organized and he could plan so well without surprise assignments being handed out. He had the ability to work ahead to keep from having a bunch of work to do all at once when several classes had papers due or exams at the same time.

After Sam got off, he stopped back by like he had done the previous weeks and Kurt let him in. As soon as Kurt shut the door behind them, Sam said, “The people who came to view the house today made a full-price offer. They want to take possession of the house in a week.”

“Wow. That’s fast.”

“They already had a pre-approved loan, so they could move fast. I guess they had been waiting on their house to sell in Columbus before starting to look. So, all that stuff we talked about last night just got moved up a lot. Are you sure your parents are going to be okay with me living there when you aren’t there during the week?”
“I’m pretty sure, but I can call my dad and make sure.” Kurt pulled his phone out and explained the situation to his dad. “It’s fine Sam. If you move in a week from now, there will just be like 7 weeks of school. If I come home on Friday afternoons and stay until Monday mornings, you’ll only be there without me four evenings a week. Are you okay with that?”

“I think I have to be because I’m not 18 yet and I can’t rent anything even if I wanted to. It will be okay. It will be weird when you’re not there, but it will be okay.”

“Alright. We’ll have to plan. Next weekend we can clean my closet out and organize my room and we can bring your stuff to my house and get it all put away while I’m home. We can make it work.”

“It’s just way faster than I had thought it would be. But it’s a much better outcome than I thought we’d be facing at the end of this week.”

“It definitely is. You better get going. I know you need to talk to your parents and get plans made more than you need to stand here kissing me, as much as I enjoy that. I’ll walk you out.” He gave him one more quick kiss and they headed for the front doors.

Wes informed everyone of a Tuesday rehearsal at what Kurt thought would be their last meeting of the year. He wondered what there would be to do with no competition to prepare for.

By the time Kurt called Carole that afternoon after his tutoring session, she had gotten him an appointment for the following Monday morning to have his ribs x-rayed, she had confirmed that Dalton had gotten the check from the school district, and she had managed to move the advocate’s meeting with the school district to noon on Monday. She called Kurt out for the whole day, allowing him to stay home Sunday night and avoid so much extra driving.

“You are amazing. I can’t believe you got everything arranged so I don’t have to drive to Lima an extra time next week. Thank you!”

“You’re welcome, honey. We’ll see you Friday night.”

“See you then.”

Kurt headed down to the office to talk to Miss Burns before she left. He handed her his vouchers and she gave him his payment.

“I’d like to see if there are still students looking for tutors. Maybe some people got their midterm grades and decided they need help.”

There have been people in today adding their names. I don’t know if any of them were for French, but you can see.” She handed him the binder.

He took down 6 more names hoping to find a few that still needed help. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

He headed up and made the calls. He was able to work out times with three of the six. It would work. He’d see two people on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday and just one person on Wednesday.
since he had his counseling sessions then.

*Perfect. Now, I’ll get to spend more time with Sam.*

Wes banged his gavel on the table. “Order.”

Everyone quieted down.

“Thank you. I know this is a last-minute request, and I need to ask one question first. Are any of you day students? Raise your hand if you are.”

No hands went up.

“Good. Then my plan will work. I want everyone to meet in the study room on the third floor of the dorm tonight at 10:05. As soon as you’ve been checked off by your RA during the room check, head to the room. Once everyone’s there, I will let you know why I’ve called the meeting. I’m releasing everyone now to work on homework so that you can have time to meet tonight.” He banged his gavel. “Dismissed.”

Everyone went to the study room as they had been told to. By 10:10, everyone had arrived. Wes put a “Study Session in Progress – Do Not Disturb” sign on the door and closed it. He and David moved one of the couches in front of the door to block it from being opened, which got quite a few puzzled looks from the pajama-clad Warblers.

They moved to the far side of the room and motioned for everyone to move close and sit on the floor.

“So, I’ve called this very unusual Warblers meeting because it has been brought to my attention that we are not the type of group that we need to be. I know that a few of you are actually friends with each other, but as a group, we have kept ourselves very closed off. Many of our families have engrained the need for absolute silence about personal issues. But I think that’s hurting us. I want to talk about a few things and we’re going to start with Kurt since we were the least accepting of him. We welcomed his amazing voice, but not his ideas until it was nearly too late to even try to implement them. And when we did, the results were amazing. If we had competed in one of the other Regional events, we would have had a really good chance of winning. The New Directions singing original songs was impossible to beat.”

David agreed with Wes. “Kurt, your suggestions for Regionals made us competition ready.”

Kurt responded, “This group is amazing musically. Next fall, perhaps the group would be better off deciding early in the school year whether it wants to be a great source of entertainment locally or whether it wants to put all of the effort it takes to compete with groups that perform much less musically challenging numbers, but dance at a much higher level. I think it would require more time than the club currently spends rehearsing – maybe a couple of separate rehearsals each week for dance training. But that’s a choice that may not appeal to the whole group.”

Wes spoke again. “When one of our own members feels too hesitant to provide input that could make us successful, the leadership needs to examine itself, so the council spent time talking Sunday and we realized that by being so structured, we’re not giving our group what it needs. We went out on a limb at the mall and that was the wrong limb to go out on. We pulled back into our tight controlled leadership after that.”
Kurt spoke up. “What we did that day was criminal.”

Thad asked, “What do you mean?”

“Jeremiah got fired because of what we did. We outed him and he was fired. Sexual orientation does not have protected status in Ohio. People get fired just for being gay.”

“I didn’t know that,” Wes said.

“We don’t know what happened to him after that. What if he went home and someone in the store had called his parents? What if they kicked him out? He could have lost his money for college, if he’s a college student. I have no idea how the council allowed that song to be sung. When I showed up that day, I hadn’t attended the rehearsal the afternoon before because I work on Friday afternoons. I expected us to sing some 50s or 60s crooner song and stand in formation while we shuffled-stepped. Blaine would sing and we would doo wop in formation. That day will live in my own personal hall of shame in my mind for the rest of my life.”

Wes was stunned silent for a few moments. He took a deep breath and let it out. “I can say that now that I know what happened, the same will be true for me.”

Most of the group nodded.

Kurt spoke again. “I know that some of you have avoided me because I am openly gay. Others have avoided me because I’m not rich. Others avoid me because I don’t play by the same rules that many of you do. But it’s also been pointed out to me that I have judged a lot of people here harshly. I think there’s a huge wall around each person at this school. So many people here are afraid to be themselves because who they really are or want to be doesn’t align with their family’s plan for their future.”

Thad spoke up, “I think that’s probably true. Many of us have never lacked anything we ever asked for and that’s because most of us learned from an early age not to ask for things that would be unacceptable. So, for example, I could ask for a $2000 computer and my father would just get it for me, no questions asked. But if I asked him for a 4-wheeler, he would look at me like I had lost my mind. I could ask to attend a computer programming course this summer and he’d pay for it, but if I asked to go to a computer animation course, he would not agree, and I’m old enough to know to not even ask. So, we are spoiled, yet completely unable to access things we might really enjoy. It’s a very odd combination to someone who’s never lived it.”

“I can see that. But I also see that by keeping your walls up 24/7, it’s practically impossible to make any real friends.”

“Kurt, what you don’t get still is that people like us don’t get to have ‘REAL’ friends,” Flint said. “We are taught from the time we are very little to be suspicious of everyone. We only associate with people of equal social standing because those people are ‘safe’. They’ve indoctrinated their kids the same way the same way we were. ‘REAL’ friends as you call them are liabilities in our world. Anyone who knows something private about you, could use it against you. So, we all end up with therapists who we talk to about our personal problems. But we see those therapists privately, so we can keep up the façade of being stoic men who are above that type of thing.”

“That’s really sad,” Kurt said.

“It’s life,” Thad said. “We don’t know any other way of life. Until we meet someone like you. And then we don’t know what to think. You challenge what we’ve been taught. You ask us questions we don’t have the answers to. That makes us nervous. It causes people to question their whole
upbringing.”

Wes steered the conversation back. “Tonight, I want us to do something really scary. I want us to be honest with each other.”

He got a lot of confused stares.

“I have sheets of paper and pencils. Everyone take one and spread out around the room. On the paper I want you to write something no one knows about you. I want this to be something that no one in the room can guess.”

Everyone got up and did what they were asked. Ten minutes later, they were mostly done.

“Alright. Fold your paper in half and in half again and pass them to Kurt, who will read each one and we’re going to talk about them.”

“Alright.” Kurt unfolded one. “My father hasn’t spoken to me about anything personal, ever. He calls me into his office and reviews my class choices and my grades. That’s it. When I am home, meals are eaten in silence. My mother is beautiful and has no role in life except to be beautiful on my father’s arm at the events he attends. I am an only child.”

“I was raised by my nanny. She spoke Spanish to me. To this day, when I hear a woman speaking Spanish, I get this warm feeling. I don’t think my parents even know that I speak Spanish.”

“I live in a museum. I’ve hated school breaks since I was 12 and my father decided I was too old for a nanny. Now, when I’m home, I’m completely alone. At least in the summer, my father sends me to enrichment programs around the world. Just about anything would beat sitting home alone in absolute silence.”

“My grandfather is a doctor. My father and his two brothers are doctors. I am an only child and I am to become a doctor as well. Except I have no interest in medicine. I actually feel really sick at the sight of blood.”

“If I put one toe out of line, I will lose my trust fund. I’m on the edge with my toes an inch from the line contemplating whether I should just jump across the line and lose everything and be myself or whether I should back away from the line and be who I am supposed to be. Why isn’t there something in between?”

“If my parents ever find out that I’m gay, I will be disowned. Where would I go? What would I do? I play the game. Every day I tell myself I’m one day closer. If I can make it until I get my degree, I will be able to get a job and make it on my own. Each day I cross off one more day of hiding who I am until I can be free.”

“I am never enough.”

“My sister got pregnant when she was 15 and I was 13. She insisted that she had been raped by my uncle. My father called her a slut and forced her to have an abortion and sent her to a girls’ school in Europe. She killed herself three months later. There was no funeral.”

“I pretend like I belong here, but I’m on scholarship and I’m a ward of the state. My parents are both in jail.”

“I wish I could be myself here at school. My boyfriend and I both attend here and we’ve been together a long time, but even though our parents know, we’re not sure how people knowing might affect the way we’re treated here.”
“I’ve planned five different ways to kill myself. Being part of this group has kept me from actually following through with any of them yet.”

“The last time I got an A-, I spent the next week lying on my stomach in my bed to let the welts on the backs of my thighs heal up.”

Kurt read the rest aloud. When he finished he was quiet for a few minutes before he spoke again. “What I see when I look around this group now is a group of teenagers that are in serious need of love and acceptance. It’s heartbreaking to know that we all wear these masks and keep everyone from seeing our true selves while we all suffer behind the masks. I won’t be here next year, but I’d suggest an activity like this at a Warblers retreat. Get off campus and actually get to know each other. Not a single note said, “I’m happy, accepted, and loved for who I am.”

“Tell us why you came here, please,” Jeff said.

“I found out something about someone who was already physically bullying me, and not because I was snooping or anything. I can’t explain how. But I shared that information with someone I shouldn’t have. And through a series of events, the bully threatened to kill me if I told anyone else. And I didn’t tell anyone else, but he bullied me worse to keep me too afraid to talk to anyone. The last of the bruising is finally fading. The student’s expulsion was overturned by the school board after he had been out of school for three days. I withdrew the day before he returned to the school. I came here because of the No Bullying policy.”

“That’s really scary.” Kurt didn’t see who said it.

“It was. I handled the situation poorly at the time, though. My only advice is that if you’re in danger, tell an adult, not another teenager. And don’t try to solve a dangerous problem without the intervention of adults, even if you’re already 18. Consult someone older and more experienced in conflict resolution. And just so you know, Mr. Adams is a really good listener. I know that going to see the school psychologist is probably looked down upon here, but maybe if more people willingly went to see him, that stigma could be changed into it being a good idea to get support and help from a highly-educated adult.”

Wes responded, “Kurt’s right. If a group of highly-respected students like the Warblers began to make use of the support offered at the school, maybe other students would begin to see it as a good idea rather than a weakness.”

“From what we all just heard me read off those papers, it seems that pretty much everyone in this group could benefit from talking to someone who is legally obligated to keep the information private.” He saw a lot of the guys nodding. “This group could become the type of group that is there for each other, if you can get to the point where you can trust each other. I know that’s hard when everyone is afraid that everyone else is a snitch.”

“Trust is a four letter word for most of us,” Liam said. “For many of us, everything we do is monitored. We couldn’t call something like a hotline for depression or something because our phone bills are paid by our fathers who would be able to see that we had made a call to the hotline.”

“Do any of you get your allowances in cash? Or maybe you’re allowed to withdraw a certain amount of cash per month? Maybe you could pool your money and pay for a single phone that anyone in the group could use. That way, you’d at least have the ability to call someone you’d like to talk to without your families finding out.”

Wes said, “That’s actually a good idea. There are pre-paid phones. We could chip in and get a couple of those that people could use.”
Quite a few people nodded.

“I’d be able to call my brother then,” one Warbler said. “My father disowned him when he refused to go to law school and I haven’t seen him in two years.”

Kurt spoke again. “Some of you that have access to cash could buy a small laptop and do the same thing with it. None of your families would have access to it and you wouldn’t have to sign into the school’s system to use it. You’d be able to email people or research information that your families deem inappropriate. Places like the mall and McDonald’s have WiFi. The laptop could be borrowed like a library book. No one would save anything on it ever, and each person could wipe the browser history before returning it.”

Wes said, “Also a good idea.”

“I want to apologize for judging all of you so harshly. I’m not like you guys. I don’t have the type of families that many of you have. I don’t have a secret to hide. I was mad that you all were so close-minded and unaccepting. You’re all struggling. I will tell you that it felt like silent bullying though. But for most of you, it’s just a way of life. Keep to yourself, follow the rules, and stay away from people who your parents won’t accept. I get it now. I’m a non-conformist and I am definitely one of those people your parents don’t want you to hang around. Even as much as I tried to blend in here, I’m just not a Dalton boy. In an effort to encourage you to be real with each other, I’m going to show you who I am when I’m not here at Dalton. You’ll have to sit closer together.” Kurt pulled up the video of “Bad Romance”. “This is one of our weekly assignments from Glee Club. We did this last spring.” He played the video for them to watch.

“That was just a weekly assignment?”

“Yeah. We’d talk about an artist or a style of music and then we’d perform solos a lot of the time, but sometimes group projects. All of the rest of the guys performed a Kiss song in full costume and make up.”

“How did you all even get those costumes?”

“We made them mostly.” He opened a photo. “This is a photo of me in something I wore to school last fall not that long before I transferred here.” He let his phone be passed around.

“When you know that people won’t like your clothing choices, why did you dress like that anyway? Why didn’t you just wear whatever all of the rest of the guys at that school wear?”

“It’s hard to explain. And maybe I don’t really have any answer other than just because I wanted to. I’m not like the other guys. And dressing like them doesn’t change that, so I might as well dress in a way that I like.”

“You’re planning on going back there next year. Aren’t you? How can you go back knowing that the person who threatened to kill you is still there? Aren’t you afraid?”

“Yes and no. The school district has changed their policies and the school is implementing a No Bullying policy. With the new policies, if any of them actually injures me again, they will be expelled, no second chance. Since the old administration never did anything about the bullying, the bullies’ parents didn’t know about it. But if they get expelled, their parents will know. So, I don’t think I will be 100% safe. I’m me. I’m openly gay in a small town full of homophobes. But I won’t likely be on the receiving end of any more broken bones.”

“That’s good,” Jeff said.
Wes said, “I think we’ve asked Kurt enough personal questions tonight. I know you all need to get to sleep. I think we’ve all learned something about making assumptions about people and I hope that those of you who will be back next year come up with a way to really be friends and to be there for each other because I think that all of us need that.”

Kurt picked up the stack of papers. “I’ll take these and destroy them.”

Wes and David moved the couch back to its original position and everyone left.

“So, everything’s working out, even though it’s really hectic.”

“That’s good news, Kurt,” Mr. Adams said.

“I got three new tutoring clients.”

“That’s a lot for one student to take on – you have 7 now?”

“I do, but I’m fine. I won’t have Warblers practice every day now. I could move this session up an hour, but you probably already have someone that comes in then.”

“I do.”

“Okay. Let’s see, what else. Oh, McKinley paid my tuition and Dalton issued my parents a refund. We’re meeting next Monday to view the policy the staff has created to deal with the bullying there. I can’t tell you how much I appreciate you telling me about getting an advocate.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll be sure to inform any other students with similar issues more quickly. I just assumed that someone else had told you. I won’t make that assumption again. It’s better to repeat important information to someone than for that person to not end up hearing it at all.”

“That’s true. Oh, and I’m still eating with Nick, Jeff, and Trent. I’m even going to see if they want to do something one evening sometime soon.”

“I hope that works out. I have news for you today. Your application was accepted. I just need to know what classes you might be interested in.”

“That was fast. English, French, and European History are the three AP courses I was going to take.”

Alright. I’ll set up a time for you to go to take the placement test for French. They can be done at the main campus or in Lima. They’re usually done on Friday afternoons.”

“Well, then, in Lima. I work Fridays and I’ll be going to Lima anyway.”

“I’ll get that set up then. I don’t think we have much else to discuss today, Kurt. I’ll let you leave a few minutes early.”

Kurt got up. “Thank you, Mr. Adams.”

It was unseasonably warm and Kurt took his tray and went outside to eat in the courtyard.

“May I join you?”
“Sure, Trent.”

Trent kept his voice low. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“For not being a better friend. I really admire your bravery. I’m just not brave like that. I’m still working on trying to get up the nerve to tell my father than I don’t want to be a doctor. Every day I see myself walking farther away from the path I want to follow. And as we all know the longer I walk on a path that diverges from the path I want to be on, the farther away I will be in the end – maybe so far away that I’ll never be able to get back to the path I want to be on. Two years from now, if I enroll in college somewhere in a pre-med program the chances that I’ll ever be a conductor are infinitesimally small. Two years. I don’t know how to change it. It’s like watching a movie where the driver’s perspective is shown in a car crash. The driver sees the object in front of them, but there’s nothing they can do to avoid the disaster. There’s a concrete lane divider to their left and swerving to the right means driving off the bridge.”

“I get that. I really do. I could do a better job of pretending to be straight. I want to be a performer. If I am any good at all, I should be able to method act my way into fitting in better. I could date a girl, I could dress differently, and I could act differently. I would be guarded every second of every day. Other than dating a girl, that’s what I’ve done here every day since last fall. And that’s what you’re doing too. The difference is that I go home and I can drop the façade and be myself. I can dance around my kitchen in a kilt and apron and sing show tunes while baking cookies, alternating with making out with my boyfriend in the laundry room off the kitchen while the cookies are in the oven.”

Trent laughed. “Sounds fun.”

“It is fun. But I imagine you go home to a prim and proper house that looks like it belongs in a designer magazine. Where everything is new and polished or antique and polished. Where you participate in stilted conversations about topics you have no personal interest in. And your idea of fun at home is watching Netflix by yourself when your parents go out to some social event.”

“You’re not far off with your guess. But I don’t watch much on Netflix. I’m more of a bootleg concert video watcher on YouTube.”

Kurt laughed. “I see.”

“At least attending live orchestra concerts is a socially acceptable thing to do. Supporting the arts is a laudable endeavor. So, I am allowed to attend such events easily. Like Wes was saying last night, it would be much harder if wanted to attend punk rock concerts or something.”

“I bet.” Kurt laughed again.

“I just have to figure out how much of myself I can afford to give up before there’s not enough me left to even care about. People have been living unfulfilling lives for centuries. The question is whether I am going to be one of those people.”

“I don’t really have any answers for you. It’s hard either way. It’s hard to swim against the current and be who you are. It’s also hard to float along with the current when the river isn’t flowing the direction you want to go. I’ve done both. I hope one day to find a way to not be doing either. I hope you do too.”

Trent nodded in understanding and got up and went back inside.
Kurt got permission from his last period class teacher to leave after he had turned in his homework, which allowed him to leave for Lima an hour earlier than normal.

Everything was a juggling act. Sam’s dad had taken the family car to Kentucky that morning, leaving just Sam’s truck to provide transportation for four people with different starting times to their days and two adults’ different afternoon schedules.

He picked Sam up at 3:45 a block from the school to prevent anyone from seeing him since they still hadn’t told anyone besides Quinn and Finn. Kurt dropped Sam off at the gas station, and then he headed to the shop to work until it was time to leave to pick Sam up at 8:00.

After Kurt left the shop, he pulled through a drive-thru and got each of them two soft tacos to tide them over until they could actually eat dinner. He was waiting for Sam when he got off. Sam ate his tacos while Kurt drove to Sam’s house.

The two of them quickly loaded the Navigator up with all of Sam’s boxes and headed to the Hummel’s. They carried everything upstairs as soon as they got there. Only then did they both relax a bit and sit down and eat the plates of food that Carole had left for them in the fridge. They ate quickly without talking, put the plates in the dishwasher, turned it on, and headed upstairs.

Kurt leaned back against the door after he had shut and locked it. “Whew. I’m dead tired. How about we just shower fast, and then we go to sleep. I know that we have to be at your house at 8:00 to load the moving truck.”

“Good idea. Shower. Some kisses. Definitely need those and a snuggle. And sleep.”

They were asleep a half-hour later.

Kurt, Sam, and Mary loaded all of the boxes while the two men they had hired loaded the furniture onto the moving truck. A few hours later, they were done and the movers headed to Kentucky with their stuff to meet Dwight at the storage unit they were using until they found a place to rent or buy. Dwight had rented a furnished efficiency for a month to give them time to look.

After the truck left, they all headed to the motel with the items that Mary and the kids were going to need while they stayed there for a few days while Mary finished the last few days of her final two weeks at the daycare. Kurt drove Mary to pick up some cleaning supplies while Sam waited for Quinn to arrive at the motel to watch the kids. They came back for Sam after Quinn had gotten there and they headed to the house clean it from top to bottom and make sure that nothing had gotten left behind.

A few hours later, there was still a little work to be done, but Quinn needed to leave, so Kurt left, picked up a cheese pizza, and drove to the motel to replace Quinn. After the kids ate, he loaded them into the Navigator and drove back to the house.

Mary ate the remaining slices and the kids got to say goodbye to the house. They collected up all of
the cleaning supplies and the few odds and ends they found and put them in the Navigator and headed back to the motel. Sam and Kurt carried the two small boxes of items into the motel room, said their goodbyes and headed to the Hummel’s for the evening.

“I think we should just get one of those pizzas for us. Who cares about carbs today? We have to have burned at least a half a pizza worth of calories.”

“You wish is my command.” Kurt turned toward Little Caesar’s and got them a cheese pizza too.

They ate it on the drive back to the Hummel’s. They dragged themselves upstairs and into the shower and back to bed.

“I never want to be a mover,” Kurt said as he cleared the bed back off. “Not that it was on my potential career list, but it is definitely never going to be on it.”

“Mine either,” Sam said as he flopped back in the bed.

“We’ll finish the room tomorrow. Snuggles and sleeping.” Kurt turned over to be the little spoon and they snuggled up and conked out.

Over breakfast, Kurt and Sam were talking.

“Why wouldn’t your mom agree to stay here with us for the next few days instead of that rundown motel?”

“She didn’t want to be a bother, despite the fact that Carole told her repeatedly that they wouldn’t be a bother. My mom is sweet, but she’s stubborn. Once she had made up her mind that she didn’t want to put your parents out more than they already had by taking in a teenager for the next year – that was that. It’s only for a few days. Maybe she just didn’t want the hassle of trying to keep the rugrats corralled here. This place isn’t exactly rugrat-proof.”

“That’s possible. Anyway, you can go spend the evenings with them every evening this week before they leave on Thursday.”

“I’m planning to go there when I get off and spend the evenings and nights there all week. I want to stay here in Lima, but I’m going to miss them.”

“I’m sorry you had to make a choice like this. I know this isn’t the ending you had hoped for.”

“It’s way better than the ending I feared most though, so I’m glad for that. I was seriously afraid that we’d be living full time in a motel like that by this weekend. My dad said that a foreclosure would tank his credit rating to the point of us not being able to rent an apartment easily. We’d have been living in a place like that until we could find someone willing to rent us a place, which would more than likely have been a dive as well.”

“They’ll be less than three hours away. You can drive that pretty easily.”

“Yeah. Not the perfect solution, but far from the worst.”

They loaded the dishwasher and headed upstairs to tackle the disaster.
“Now, the fashion show begins.”

Sam clapped and cheered.

“Well, I should say now the clothes get rearranged and at some point there will be a fashion show. Why don’t you just take everything down off all of the shelves on the right and stack the books on the floor in front of the window and put anything breakable on my dresser. Also, the extra shelves are stacked at the bottom. The stereo needed the extra space. Actually, help me with the center first. That would make more sense.”

They emptied the center section and repositioned all of the shelves. They moved the stereo system to the center.

While Sam working on the shelving, Kurt moved the vanity in front of the double window so he could open the storage cabinet that it was sitting in front of. He pulled out his spring and summer clothes that were stored inside and started cleaning his closet out. He sorted through all of his winter clothing and moved all of his sweaters and most of his dark colored shirts long sleeved shirts to the lower shelves in the storage cabinet. He put the heavier jackets and fall and winter vests in the top section on the hanging bars he had installed after they first moved in.

He sorted through his costumes and placed the ones he might actually re-wear back into the garment bags. The costumes that he knew he would never re-wear, but wanted to photograph before he donated them, he hung on the shower doorframe to get them out of the way.

He hung up the short-sleeved shirts and hung them next to the few remaining long-sleeved shirts he had left in the closet.

He stacked the clothing he wasn’t going to keep on his pillows. He pulled all his pants out of the closet and looked through them. He put the ones he was certain he liked back in the closet and left the others stacked on the bed.

“I have this huge stack of pants I need to try on. I’ve been at Dalton for so long and I haven’t worn like 90% of my clothes this winter. I need to let some of this stuff go. I’ve honed my style since a few years ago and I’m sure that I don’t need this many pairs of pants. He started trying the pants on while Sam emptied the right-hand shelves and repositioned all of the shelves, including the ones that had been stacked at the bottom.

“This is a really cool set up with everything being adjustable. If I ever get a house of my own, I think I’d like to put something like this in.”

“I do really like it. I had metal shelving in my old room, which I liked, but this is a lot more flexible since everything is adjustable.”

Kurt tried on all of the pants and decided which ones to keep while Sam was working on the shelves. He put all the pairs he was keeping back into the closet and left the rejects folded on the bed.

“Oh, now I’m going to go through my side and pull off what I don’t want to keep. As soon as you get an empty box, I’d like to use it to put the stuff I’m not keeping in.”

“Got it,” Sam said.

The both worked on their sections for over an hour. They managed to fit what they wanted to on the shelves. They had a couple of boxes of things to donate, a box of things to sell, and more boxes to empty still.
“Lunch?”

“Nah, let’s stick it out and see if we can get rid of the rest of the boxes, even if we don’t get it all put away yet. That way we can break the boxes down and move around more easily.”

“Alright. I’ll work on the dresser drawers while you start putting your hanging clothes in the closet.”

Kurt moved some of the stuff from his dresser into the storage cabinet where he had put the winter clothes. He refolded and reorganized the remaining drawers.

“The dresser is ready for your clothes. Switch places with me and I’ll hang clothes and you can organize your half of the dresser however you like.”

A little over an hour from the first time Kurt asked, Sam was ready to break for lunch. He pulled out a pocketknife and flattened most of the boxes and they carried them out to the garage before heading into the kitchen to make lunch. After they ate, they went right back up to the room to keep working.

“Well, we have stuff and things,” Sam laughed.

“Very descriptive,” Kurt deadpanned.

“I didn’t open the box that has my DVDs in it because I didn’t know where to put them.”

“Oh, I put mine up here. He pointed to one of the center shelves. You can put yours there with mine, if you want.”

“That works.”

“And I also have stuff and things in the cabinets in the middle section. Feel free to add your stuff and things to mine.”

Sam laughed.

“Don’t forget the shelving along the side of the bed. That side area is shelving that opens to the side. It’s narrow, but it’s good for stuff and things. Just take my stuff off the shelving on your side and put it on the dresser. I’ll deal with it later. You can put anything you want on those shelves.”

“Got it.” Sam started taking Kurt’s stuff off the side shelves and putting it on the dresser. “I like the inner alcove. That’s a good place for an alarm clock, headphones, and my phone.”

“I think over the summer, we’re going to need to figure out how to fit at least a small study table in here. We’ll work on it. It’s not a big deal for another five months when we’ll both be studying in this room.”

“This is like a weird fantasy dream where totally random things happen that sort of make sense, but don’t. I would have never in a million years thought I would be sharing your room with you in your house.”

“Me neither. My dad is treating me like an adult, which is sort of like what you just described. A weird fantasy dream that sort of makes sense, but doesn’t. But I’m okay with this. Are you? I mean Finn completely freaked out when he was going to share my room in the basement of our old house, so my experience sharing a living space is non-existent. I want this to work, and I’m sure that we’ll need to make adjustments to what we’ve done in here today, but I think we can make it work.” I hope we can make it work. Please say this is okay. Kurt looked nervous.
Sam stepped closer and put his arms around him. “It’s fine. We can make this work. We can make adjustments as we go along. I won’t move any of your stuff while your gone. But if something of yours is repeatedly causing a problem, I’ll tell you on the weekends and we’ll figure it out. And you can do the same. If I put something of mine somewhere while you’re not here and it bothers you when you come back, we’ll work it out. I think everyone’s given you some kind of complex where you feel like your wants or desires are ridiculous. They aren’t. And you’ve already shown that you care. And I care about you. We’ll work together.”

“Okay.”

“Okay.” Sam kissed him. “I’ll flatten the rest of the boxes, unless you need one for something else.”

“Nope. I’m good. I’ll carry down the stuff we aren’t keeping. And the box of stuff that I’m going to sell – um, I’ll put in the closet for now because I didn’t go through everything yet.”

When they got back upstairs, Kurt pulled camera out of the cabinet. “I’m going to put each of these costumes on and I want you to take photos, okay?”

“Sure.”

“I can’t think of any reason why I would re-wear any of these, but I did spend a lot of time making some of them and I thought maybe I should photograph them?”

“I think so. I know you’re thinking of studying music, but since we haven’t actually applied to any colleges yet, we don’t know what we’ll be asked to turn in. Better safe than sorry. I should probably do that with my sculptures and pottery pieces. But I need to find a way to do it with really good lighting.” Sam looked around the room. “Let’s take them in the alcove because I think that area has the best lighting and standing in front of that built-in cabinet will look fine.” He stepped into the bathroom doorway. “This will work. I can stand here and get a full body shot with the nice lighting through the alcove window. With a secondary light source, I could probably use this same area to photograph the sculptures, pottery and my other artwork. I will have to start letting some of it go or sell it or my half of the room will look like an art museum.”

“I’d actually like to go to an art museum.”

“That can be one of our dates.”

Kurt kissed Sam, who was still standing in the bathroom doorway. “You can use my camera to photograph anything you want to. I’m not sure about the secondary light source, but you’re welcome to move the lamps around in here to take the photos if you need to. If you do it in the next few days, you can send a few of the pieces home with your mom as gifts.”

“That’s a good idea. I have pieces at school too.”

“If we’re going to take the photos, you’re going to have to let me in there to get the costumes on.”

“Right.” But Sam didn’t move.

“Please?”

Sam didn’t budge.

“Wrong magic word. Hmm.” He put his hands on Sam’s shoulders and kissed him gently a few times, but Sam didn’t budge. “Kisses aren’t the toll, either. Do I get a clue?”
Sam just smiled.

Kurt wrapped his arms around Sam and pressed in and kissed him breathless. After Sam caught his breath, he scooted to the side and let Kurt into the bathroom. Kurt swagged around and gave Sam a striptease while getting undressed to put the “Bad Romance” outfit on while humming the song.

Sam had the same toll each time Kurt needed to go back into the bathroom to change.

“I have a couple that are too small. I’m going to stand on my stool and hold them against the cabinet so you can photograph them, front and back. I might have photos of me in them on a CD, but just in case.”

Kurt put his clothes back on and they photographed the remaining costumes.

“Are you sure you don’t want to keep any of them?”

“I’m sure. I have to let some things go. Otherwise, I’ll need a space the size of this room just to store clothing and costumes. We both create. We have to learn to enjoy our creations and then let some of them move on. Otherwise, we’ll be 60 and live in a house this size with our bed in our walk-in closet while the rest of the house is filled with sculptures, paintings, pottery, costumes, clothing, and accessories.”

“You’re right. It’s just so hard to let them go sometimes.”

“I know. Maybe we could make digital journals or something. We should see if there’s software that has template pages or something where we can drop in a photo and then type in a text box to write about the photo. Something we don’t have to spend a ton of time formatting.”

“That’s a good idea. If we start now, it can become a habit to use it before we have way too many photos to input at once. It can be our first summer project once school is out. So, what do we do with these now?”

“I think I’ll put trash bags over them and put them in the garage on the rack we hang wet coats on. I can put them in the back of the Navigator on Monday. I’ll donate them in Columbus where there might be more interest in them.”

They bagged them and took them to the garage. Kurt grabbed the vacuum cleaner on the way back upstairs. He vacuumed the whole room and they moved the vanity back in front of the cabinet. He vacuumed the hall, and then put the vacuum back away and came back upstairs.

“Now what?”

“Don’t you have a pile of homework to do for Monday morning?”

“Oh, yeah. I’ll get that out.” Sam pulled everything out and put it on the bed. “Math?”

“Math.”

Carole came upstairs a few minutes later and found the two of them both lying on their stomachs on the bed while Kurt was explaining to Sam how to solve equations with three variables using just two equations. She stood there for a few minutes and finally tapped her knuckles on the open door.

“Oh, hey Carole,” Kurt said.
“I’m going to be a completely truthful adult.”

“Okay…”

“I’m a nurse. I went to college for four years. I can’t solve those equations. It’s a big scam. No one needs to know how to do that. Computers do it in like less than a second. It takes 20 times longer to type it in than it does for the computer to solve it.”

“Thanks, Carole,” Kurt said dryly. “You’ve given him even less motivation to learn how to do this than he previously had, which was barely any. Now, we’ll be down to none.”

Carole and Sam laughed.

“At least Kurt can explain it to you. If you came to me or Burt, we’d point you to the nearest tutoring center and suggest that you make an appointment.”

Kurt laughed. “I’m less expensive.”

“This is true,” Sam said. “He does it for kisses.”

“Sam!” Kurt looked indignant and his eyes flashed.

“Well, seems like a good deal for you then, Sam.” Carole laughed.

“I’m assuming you came up here for some other reason than to tease me and demoralize Sam.”

“I did. Finn is staying at Puck’s until curfew. Burt and I are going out to dinner. I have made a casserole and put it in the oven.” She checked her phone. “It will be done in 53 minutes. Please set your phone and go get it out. I doubt you can hear the oven timer beep up here, even with door open.”

“Thanks for making us something. Have fun with Dad. The two of us are going to go out at some point. Maybe June at this rate.”

“Next weekend you won’t have to spend all day Saturday moving stuff, so you’ll have more time.” She turned to walk out the door, but paused before stepping out. “At least pretend to care, Sam.” She winked at him and left.

“She’s a hoot.”

“She is. She’s always been super nice to me. I didn’t know how I would feel about her living with us because she’s not my mom, but she’s been really great. She didn’t banish my mom’s recipes or get rid of my mom’s baking utensils or anything. She kept all of it and I really appreciated that. I used to love baking with my mom and it makes me still feel close to her in a way – to use her measuring spoons and stuff.” Kurt wiped his eyes. “Enough of that. Back to systems of equations.”

“Why is this important?”

“Well, first and foremost because you don’t want to be in high school forever. And this is the last required math course for you to graduate. Finish this and no more math until college.”

“Alright.”

“And just think about how important this is for sci fi movies.”

“What you mean?”
“What to x and y represent?”

“Points on a graph.”

“Yep. And z?”

“Don’t know.”

“It’s the 3rd dimension. Having all three gives you a point in space. Formulas like these describe lines, like trajectories from space canons and laser beams. To know where they will intersect in space, you use formulas like these. Without them all of the CGI stuff would be lame because nothing would hit its target at the right time or location.”

“Fine, fine. You win. It’s relevant and important, just not to me in my future career of choice. I’ll focus and try.”

Kurt kissed him.

Sam laughed.

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They ate dinner, packed up the leftovers, washed everything, ran the dishwasher and returned to their room to get the rest of Sam’s homework done.

“We should have stopped before we took the photos. I’m sorry. I should have checked your list of work that needed done. Let’s get going and I’ll type as fast as I can.”

They blasted through everything, but didn’t get in bed until midnight.

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Monday morning came too early. Sam wanted his snuggles and kisses, which he got, but in a much smaller quantity than usual.

“You have to get to school on time. I’m going to the doctor’s office, then I have to be at the superintendent’s office at noon to hear what kind of plan the school has come up with.”

“You’re still coming to Glee, right?”

“Yes. I’ll text you when I park and tell you where I am, so you can come out and meet me.”

Kurt dropped him off a block from the school and headed to the doctor’s office.

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Kurt didn’t have to wait long to be taken back to have the x-ray done. What involved waiting was seeing the doctor afterwards. Carole showed up about an hour after Kurt had gotten there. She came in and sat down with him.

“After this, you and I are going shopping and out to lunch.”

“What are we shopping for?”

“A new dress.”
“What’s the occasion?”

“One of my cousin’s daughters is getting married in May. But I may have to go shopping more than once to find what I want, so I figured I’d start today when my very best shopping partner is actually in town and not covered in grease or buried in textbooks.”

*She’s a sweetheart and a keeper. No wonder Dad loves her so much. She makes everyone feel special.* “Hopefully this won’t take too much longer, so we’ll have more time to shop. Where are we having lunch?”

“I figured the food court at the mall since that’s where we’ll be. The Korean place that went in that empty spot is actually really good.”

“Ooh. I haven’t tried it yet. I haven’t been to the mall in a long time.”

“Kurt Hummel.”

Kurt and Carole stood.

“And you are?” The nurse asked Carole.

“Carole Hummel.”

“This way.”

They sat down in the examination room they’d been led to and sat down. Just a few minutes later, the doctor came in.

“Kurt’s x-ray shows three previously fractured ribs on the left-hand side and one previously more severely fractured rib on the right. The fracture on the right side is older, by a year or so. The fractures on the left side are from about 4-5 months ago, based on the x-ray.”

“So, in November, last fall.”

“Yes.”

“I need you to write a statement that indicates that please. And we need it today, if at all possible. We are in a legal process and this injury is part of the proceedings. Today was the first day I could get an appointment since I learned of the injury. He didn’t tell us about it at the time.”

“I see.”

“He was being injured by a fellow student.”

“That’s a shame. Schools should be safe places.”

“I agree,” Kurt said. “Hopefully, that will be the outcome of this case.”

“I’ll get a letter written up right away. The receptionist will call your name when you can pick it up from the window. Would you like to take the x-rays with you?”

“Yes, please.”

“I’ll have them put in a sleeve for you.”

“Thanks for your time and help with this.”
“Can I point out something else?” The doctor stopped on his way out and turned back around before he actually opened the door.

“Sure.”

“His arms were at his sides in one of the views. There was a very old break on his right ulna, halfway between his wrist and elbow, probably 8-10 years ago. But he had a fractured left ulna, about three inches above the wrist, at about the same time as the fractured rib on the right side.”

“The right arm was from when I fell off my bike when I was 9. I wore a cast for 6 weeks. The other two were from school. One day, mid-fall a year ago, the oafs from the hockey team dumped me in the dumpster behind the cafeteria the day after it had been emptied. It’s larger than the dumpster in the parking lot and I fell farther and there were no trash bags to break my fall. The fractured rib was more than likely because I fell on my book bag with books in it. And I hit my arm on the side of the dumpster on the way down.”

“You didn’t tell anyone then either did you?”

“No. I bought a wrist brace from the drugstore and wore it for a month and said that I had sprained my wrist at school. I just took painkillers when I had to.”

“Why didn’t you tell anyone, Kurt?” Carole asked.

He took a deep breath. “The jocks never got in trouble for it. No one would have done anything about it, even if I had told someone. And honestly, I was afraid that if I went to the doctor, the doctor would see all of my bruises and think that my dad abused me. I was always covered in bruises. My dad was all I had and he loves me more than anything in the world. I was afraid they’d put me in foster care and take me from him. The jocks cover for each other. None of them would have admitted the truth.”

“I see,” the doctor said.

“I didn’t seek medical care last fall because my dad had just been in a coma from the heart attack and arrhythmia and I couldn’t bring myself to tell him what was happening to me at school. I thought it might make him have another heart attack and die.” Kurt was crying by then, but trying not to.

Carole reached over and grabbed the tissue box and put it next to Kurt, who grabbed a few and wiped his eyes and nose.

“The person who caused the most recent fractures was one of the people that caused the older injuries as well.”

“I hope you win whatever it is that your case is for.”

“Thank you,” Kurt said.

The doctor left.

Carole pulled Kurt into a hug. “Honey, I’m so sorry. I just feel broken and like the worst mother in the world that Finn was part of this. You’ve been hurt so many times and you forgive and you forgive. You’re incredible. Let’s go wait for him to write up his report.”

“Thank you.” He hugged her tight.

“Oh, honey, you’re going to make me cry harder. I will do whatever I can to protect you from now
on. Mama bears are vicious.”

After their shopping trip and lunch, they met Burt at the superintendent’s office a little before noon. Carole had Burt get in Kurt’s Navigator with her.

“Honey, you have to tell him before we go in there.”

“The x-ray showed three fractured ribs from this fall and one fractured rib and a fracture above my left wrist from about a year and a half ago. I got those from a dumpster toss that Karofsky and his hockey pals gave me. The dumpster near the cafeteria was empty and it’s taller.” Oh, God. Don’t freak out and have a heart attack or get out and go throttle Karofsky again.

“I’ve had time to process this already, Kurt. Finn told me what happened at school. Of course, his account wasn’t told in the right order or with a lot of detail, but I know about a lot of the things that were done to you without knowing the specific details. I was really upset when he told me, but I’ve had time to work through some of the initial anger, if that’s what the two of you are worried about.”

“I’m worried about you having another heart attack when Mrs. Huntington sticks her fangs into Karofsky and he tells the truth.”

Burt laughed. “Well, we’ll see. I think I’ll be fine. Well, of course not fine, but not shocked to the point of heart attack. Let’s get inside.”

“Has David made his choice?” Mrs. Huntington asked the three Karofskys before the meeting officially began.

“I don’t want to leave McKinley. All of my friends are there. I don’t want to spend my senior year at another school.”

“Is your family interested in covering the costs the school district will incur to place Kurt Hummel in an out-of-district placement because you are still at McKinley?”

No one in the Karofsky family answered.

“I want to talk to Kurt,” David said. “I want to talk to him before the meeting starts.”

“I’ll ask him if he’s willing to talk to you,” Mrs. Huntington said.

She walked to where the Hummels were seated. “David would like to speak to Kurt before the meeting.”

“No,” Burt said.

“Dad, let me talk to him. Not completely alone. I’ll take Coach Beiste. He won’t dare do anything to me with her watching.”

“Fine. I’ll go arrange it and come back for you.”

Five minutes later, Coach Beiste escorted Kurt to the hallway.
“Stay here. David and I are going to step down the hall a bit. You’ll be able to see us still.”

She nodded. She crossed her arms and stood like a centurion and stared at the two of them.

Kurt and David both turned their backs to her. Kurt spoke very quietly. “Tell me why you want to talk to me. And be quiet and fast about it.”

“So, Santana knows and you’re too scared to cross her because she’s can be an evil bitch.”

“ Exacty. Oh, and I’m her new boyfriend. Whatever. I’d rather kiss her and act like we’re in love than to spend the summer in conversion camp. I don’t turn 18 until August. My mother will never accept me. I just need to finish high school, get a sports scholarship or something, and get out of this town.”

“You and me both.”

“Yeah.”

“Fine. I will go in there and I will present a third option, but you better act like it’s the best thing since sliced bread and you better play the part of penitent ex-bully REALLY well or Mrs. Huntington is going to eat you for lunch. I have x-rays showing five fractured bones at your hands.”

“Oh, God. Really?”

“Save your sorry act for inside.”

“No, really I am sorry. I didn’t know I had actually hurt you like that.”

“I have no padding, you jackass. What do you think happens when thin people get banged into lockers and dropped into empty dumpsters? Anyway, save your regret for in there. You better be really convincing. Let’s go.”

Kurt went back inside. Coach Beiste and David followed him.

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Coach Beiste stood to address the group. “During our process of creating a plan to eliminate bullying from McKinley, a group of students came forward wanting to create a club called the Bully Whips. We haven’t approved the name or the club yet, but it is in the discussion stages. The club’s purpose would be to function in a similar way that crossing guards do. These students would patrol the halls during passing periods to monitor student behavior. The students would be called upon to provide testimony in any situations where student violence was witnessed. They also volunteered to escort any students who felt intimidated from one class to another, but we chose not to accept that offer. We want to eliminate the need for any of the students to need personal protection.”

Miss Pillsbury stood. “We have created a document, which will be distributed during an assembly. Each student must turn in a signed form – signed by both the student and the student’s guardian indicating that they have read the rules and have agreed to follow them.” She passed a copy of the
document to Mrs. Huntington. “We created it based on researching similar documents that other schools have used. The slushies will not be allowed to leave the cafeteria area. And they are specifically listed along with all forms of liquid as projectiles. Many people wanted to remove the slushie machines, but they are part of the sports revenue budget, which the school needs for funding. The only liquid that will be allowed in the hallways of the school is water.”

“I will read the document in a minute, please go on with your presentation.”

Coach Sue stood next. “The teachers will be required to stand outside their classroom doors during passing periods. Any teacher who witnesses any act or behavior that goes against the form the students signed will be required to notify the main office in writing within 24 hours of the offense. Any violent offense will be dealt with immediately by the teacher escorting the students to the main office.”

Kurt stood. “May I ask a question?”

No one stopped him, so he continued.

“Most of the teachers at the school are afraid of the bullies. How do you propose that let’s say, Mrs. Attkisson force someone like Azimio Adams to go to Figgins’ office? She isn’t even 5 feet tall and probably weighs 90 pounds.”

“Coach Beiste and I will be ‘on call’ as it were. The teachers will be given a phone number to call. One of us will respond to the location. Not a single one of those bullies will dare backtalk one of us. The phones will be used only for this purpose so there will be no chance of us missing a call. If we find that the two of us are not enough of a deterrent initially, the school will hire a security officer to respond to the calls.”

“What about during class? What’s preventing the bullies from asking to go to the bathroom and instead wandering the halls to pick on any ‘losers’ in the halls or the bathrooms during classes?”

Miss Pillsbury responded. “Teachers will be assigned stations throughout the hallways at strategic points where they will spend their free period each day. They can grade papers or prepare their lessons at a chair with an arm desk. Students in the hallways during class periods without a pass will be escorted directly to the principal’s office. No exceptions.”

Kurt nodded. “May I read that document, please?”

Mrs. Huntington passed it to him. He skimmed it quickly.

“Another issue. No one has mentioned the dumpsters.”

Coach Sue stood to respond. “The dumpsters we currently have are being replaced by these models instead.” She held up a printed photo. “They do not have openings in the tops that can be opened by people. The truck that comes to empty them has a device that lifts the lids when they’re emptied. The doors on the front slide from side to side. The school is going to place a privacy fence around the dumpsters the way restaurants do. Students needing to throw things away will need to use one of the trashcans inside the school building. The staff will be provided with keys to open the fenced area.”

Kurt nodded.

“What will the punishment be for violating the terms of the document?”

Miss Pillsbury answered. “Violent offenses will result in suspension for a first offence. A second offense will lead to expulsion.”
“Which we have seen the school board overturn.” Kurt said sarcastically.

“That policy has changed as well.” Miss Pillsbury assured him.

Kurt spoke again. “With a zero-tolerance policy, many times the victims are punished equally with the perpetrators. This has been my main reason for never fighting back. Whenever both parties have thrown punches, both parties get punished. Those defending themselves should not be suspended or expelled.”

“That has been addressed in our new policy as well.”

Kurt sat down.

Mrs. Huntington spoke. “I’ve read this document. I have seen similar ones used in other schools quite effectively. Has your staff been in contact with other public schools that have chosen to implement this type of plan?”

“We have,” Miss Pillsbury answered. “We’ve been working closely with two schools that had huge problems with student violence, much worse than ours. They had a number of violent attacks, such as knife wounds.”

“I am pleased with your progress. I will review everything and I’d like to be present at the next session you have with one of these schools that has succeeded. Back to the issue of David Karofsky’s continued presence at McKinley and Kurt Hummel’s personal safety,”

Kurt interrupted her. “I have a proposal.”

She gave him a look that indicated her level aggravation, but she let him speak.

“It is my plan to attend McKinley part time next year and to participate in the dual-credit program at OSU Lima. David has made his wish to remain at McKinley with his friends and desire to play football and hockey very clear. He has assured me that he is no longer interested in bullying anyone and that he has learned his lesson and wants to move ahead to adulthood and leave the childish behavior in the past.”

“What are you proposing, Kurt?” Mrs. Huntington asked.

“I propose that David apply to the same program. I know he’s in calculus this year. The dumb jock routine he’s been portraying at school is not who he really is academically. I propose that he apply to one of the local colleges and that he attend classes elsewhere when I am McKinley. So for example, I could enroll in courses at OSU Lima in the afternoons and attend McKinley in the mornings. And David could attend McKinley in the afternoons and attend courses at a local college in the mornings. And he has to sign an additional form created by me and Mrs. Huntington delineating his behavior towards me and the Glee Club since I was his main target and they were the secondary targets of his bullying.”

“Why are you offering this, Kurt?” Miss Pillsbury asked.

“David says that he has learned from his mistakes. That is what I want. I don’t revenge. If I wanted revenge, I could have stalked him and done something to him outside of school. I’m not a vengeful person. What I want is to go to school, learn, spend time with my friends, and not have to live in a dorm an hour and a half away from my family to do it. I just want to live in peace. I just want him to leave me alone – and my friends as well. I want to finish high school without being bullied.”

“I will agree to Kurt’s proposal,” David said as he stood up. “He’s correct that I am in calculus. I’m
also taking physics. There are no higher math or science classes for me to take at McKinley. I didn’t know that taking college classes while still in high school was possible. But I would like to enroll in that program too. I can go McKinley part time and take math and science classes at a local college. And I agree to his terms of being at the school at opposite times and whenever we have to be there at the same time, I will absolutely leave him and his friends alone. I want to go to a good college and having an expulsion on my record will keep that from happening. I’m done being who I was. Being at the top of the heap in a high school in a small town means nothing. Getting into a good college so I can make something of my life is what is important. And I’m really sorry it took Kurt getting hurt for me to realize what a jackass I’ve been.”

“Well, that’s a surprising turn of events,” Miss Pillsbury said.

“It is,” Mrs. Huntington agreed. “Let it be known that we do have evidence of Kurt’s injuries at the hands of David Karofsky. Should he decide to go back to his bullying ways, that evidence will find its way to an attorney who will seek to prosecute in a court of law, not a superintendant’s office.”

David stood again. “I understand. It will never happen again. I honestly had no idea that Kurt had ever actually been injured.”

“Kurt – explain.” Coach Sue stood and demanded.

Kurt stood. “Five bone fractures.”

Mrs. Huntington put her hand on the x-ray folder and held up the doctor’s statement. “Kurt has brought medical evidence of the physical injuries caused by David. I have x-rays showing three fractured ribs from the bullying this past fall and a more severely fractured rib and fractured ulna from an injury a year prior to that.”

Paul and Esther Karofsky looked like they were going to be sick.

Miss Pillsbury spoke again. “It’s obvious that both David and Kurt want to attend McKinley for their senior year next year. David is still enrolled and will be part of the plan that is in the process of being implemented. He will have already signed the agreement and will be attending under the new policies for about 6 weeks before the school year ends. That 6-week period will be his probationary period. If he follows the agreement during probationary period, he will be allowed to remain enrolled for the fall term. I will set up an appointment to meet with David and go over the details and requirements of the dual-enrollment options in Lima. If for some reason, his application is rejected, we will have another meeting with both families to determine other possible options. Is this agreeable to all parties?”

Kurt answered first. “It is to me.”

David answered. “Yes.”

Kurt added. “I expect his change in behavior to start right now. He can’t just act the way he previously has until the day he signs that paper. If he’s serious, his behavior will change immediately and isn’t actually dependent on a piece of paper. If he has had a true revelation and change of heart, it should be evident immediately.”

“Kurt’s right. I’m serious about this. No more slushie facials, no more name calling, no shoving, nothing. Even if it isn’t currently against the rules. I’m just going to mind my own business and do my schoolwork. I need to spend any free time doing whatever I need to do to get into that dual-credit program.”
“Fine.” Mrs. Huntington stated. “The point of this process was for Kurt to be able to attend McKinley safely. If Kurt is willing to graciously allow David to stay at the school, that’s fine. But as I mentioned, one toe out of line, and I will move this case to the court system. You are being given a giant undeserved chance, David Karofsky. Use it wisely.”

“Yes, ma’am,” David said. “I understand.”

“As far as I’m concerned, the rest of this meeting can take place without the two students and their families. Does anyone object to them being released from the meeting?”

No one spoke up.

“The six of you are free to leave.”

Mrs. Karofsky stopped the Hummels in the hallway. “Can I see the x-rays? I know it’s a strange request, but I just can’t wrap my mind around the fact that David hurt someone so badly.”

“Follow me,” Kurt said. They walked to the front of the building where there were a lot of windows. He raised the blinds on one section. He opened the envelope and pulled the x-rays out one at a time. “This one shows the most recent fractures on my left ribs. That was from being shoved hard into the locker bays. Unfortunately for me, that time I had my locker open and my side hit the lower edge of the my locker.”

She was crying by then.

He slipped that x-ray back in. “This one you can see the older more fractured right rib. That happened when I landed on my book bag that had textbooks in it when David dumped me into an empty dumpster. I fell about five feet and landed on the book edges.”

He put that one back and took another one out. “This is the one where you can see my left arm.” He pointed to the area. “That’s the fracture I got from hitting my arm on the edge of the dumpster during the fall before I landed on the books.”

She was searching in her purse for a tissue and she wiped her eyes and her nose.

David stepped forward. “Kurt, I’m really sorry. I knew doing those things was wrong, but honestly I didn’t know you had been hurt.”

“David, the fractures aren’t what hurt the most. Broken bones heal. But living in fear is much worse than the actual pain of the injury. Never knowing when someone is just going to grab me and dunk my head in a toilet and nearly drown me or not knowing when someone is going to throw a slushie at me and ruin hundreds of dollars worth of clothing or soak my homework so that I get a zero because I can’t turn it in. Or break my phone by knocking it out of my hands and send it crashing into the concrete wall or floor. Everything you did has caused me daily torment that didn’t stop when I left the school. No, I get to revisit these horrible things in my nightmares. A single 99-cent slushie has cost me hundreds of dollars. When my textbooks won’t open because the pages are stuck together, I have to pay for new textbooks. We rent those textbooks, but when they get destroyed, I have to pay the full price of the destroyed book to be issued a new one. The school doesn’t just issue me clean textbooks for free. I have a folder at home with receipts showing the cost of the bullying. It’s thousands of dollars, and that doesn’t count our roof.”

“Roof?” Mr. Karofsky asked.
“Yeah,” Burt spoke up. “I had to replace the roof on our old house because the football team nailed our lawn furniture up there.”

Mr. Karofsky turned to David. “David, this stuff isn’t bullying. It’s assault and personal property damage and destruction of property.”

“I knew about the roof, but I didn’t participate. I can tell you who did if you want to know, though,” David offered.

“I’ll think about it, kid,” Burt said. “I’ll tell you this, though. Kurt took all of this torture without ratting any of you out. Until that day in the choir room when Finn said what you had been doing after I saw you in the hallway – I didn’t know much of any of this. Kurt works hard. He has since he was old enough to work the front desk at the shop at 14. He’s paid for all of that stuff that you and your friends ruined. Except the roof, as he said – I took out a loan for that because it had to be done right away. Until two minutes ago, I didn’t know that he had paid to replace textbooks. I didn’t know he had any broken bones until 10 minutes before I walked into that room today. You call him a coward and a sissy and whatever other names. You just think about this – How long would you have withstood all the crap you’ve put him through alone? You broke three of his ribs not long after I had gotten home from being in a coma. He took care of ME with broken ribs he didn’t even tell me about. And HE’S a sissy? I don’t think so.” Burt’s face was full of rage. “Kurt may have decided to forgive you and let you learn from your mistakes, but not me. Not today. You don’t deserve the chance he’s giving you. You deserve to be sitting in jail for assaulting my kid and making his life a living hell.”

Kurt moved between them. “Dad, this is my decision and I stand by it. If he breaks the agreement, I’ll let whatever lawyer Mrs. Huntington recommends go after him in court, but I’m sure that David is serious about this, aren’t you David?”

“Yes. Yes, I’m serious. I’m done. You can even copy that stuff you have in your file and I’ll pay back the damages. I figure I’m responsible for at least half of it. Azimio probably a third and the rest would be various other hockey or football players.”

“That’s probably close. Maybe more like 60% you, 30% Azimio and 10% other jocks, because a lot of them stopped last fall, but I would agree to a 50% reimbursement of my expenses from your bullying. And you can pay for the x-rays and the doctor’s bill from this morning.”

“Fine.”

Mr. Karofsky spoke, “I’ll talk to David about how he can fund this reimbursement. It may take him some time, depending on how much it comes to. He’ll have to get a job once school is out.”

“That’s fine,” Kurt said. “I work 8-12 hours a week at the shop now. I used to work more, but being at boarding school 90 minutes away makes that harder to do since I can only work on Friday afternoons and Saturdays. So, I took on tutoring clients through the school and I’m tutoring 7 students weekly now. So, I’m back to working a more normal amount of time now.”

“So, you’ve been working 15-20 hours a week since you were 14?” David asked.

“Yep. My dad’s big on personal responsibility and accountability.”

“I am,” Burt offered. “And you’ve been a jackass to my kid for years. He’s old enough to make his own choices and if this is what he chooses, that’s fine. His life, his choice. He’ll make copies and we’ll bring them over to your house.”
Burt turned and walked toward the door. Carole followed him. Kurt put the blinds back down.

“I’ll work on the photocopies. I’ll do it this weekend. I have to go back to Dalton tonight. I have school tomorrow.”

“That’s fine, Kurt,” Paul said.

Kurt turned and followed his parents outside. He handed Carole the envelope with the x-rays to take back to the house. “I’ll see you later. I’ll be back home after Glee. Maybe we can eat an early dinner together before I drive back to Dalton.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” Carole said. “We’ll see you later, honey.”

Kurt pulled up to McKinley and parked in the lot. He texted Sam and told him where he had parked. He sat with the doors locked and waited for the final bell to ring so Sam could come outside. Once he got to the door, Kurt opened it to get out.

“I think you’ll want to just go home,” Sam said. “It’s a mess. There are photos of us at my house and at the motel and photos of Quinn too. They’re in something called _The Muckraker_. JBI and Becky started passing them out before last period. I think everyone in the school has one by now.”

“I’m not leaving you here to face that alone. If you want, I’ll walk in about 10 feet ahead of you so no one sees us together, but I’m not going to let you face this by yourself.” Kurt got out and locked the Navigator and headed to the choir room.

He entered to find people shouting. “So Quinn’s cheating on Finn with Sam? And Kurt and Sam too?” Mercedes said.

“Kurt’s cheating on Blaine with Sam.” Rachel said. “And Quinn’s cheating on Finn with Sam.”

Sam responded, “Kurt’s not cheating on Blaine with me. Neither is Quinn.”

“I’m NOT cheating on Blaine,” Kurt said.

“I’m not cheating on Finn,” Quinn said.

“Since when was Kurt dating Blaine?” Artie asked.

“Since over a week before Regionals,” Rachel answered. “Blaine told me he was asking him that afternoon.”

“So, they’ve been dating not even two weeks and Kurt’s cheating on him?” Puck asked.

“Out at that sleazy motel by the edge of town AND at Sam’s house during spring break. Quinn was there too while Finn was in Columbus with his mom. While the cat’s away the mice will play.” Rachel said.

“That cat isn’t a nice mouse-sitter if it doesn’t let the mice have any fun,” Brittany said.

Santana stomped in holding a copy of the newspaper and yelled at Brittany over her word choice on her _Fondue for Two_ show. Brittany was totally confused about why Santana was angry.

Quinn was staring straight ahead. Finn was keeping his mouth shut. Sam took his backpack and left the room. A few minutes later, Kurt got a text from Sam saying that he would wait for Kurt a few
blocks from the school.

Mr. Schue stepped in and said, “Enough. I have a special guest with us today. April Rhodes came in and the two of them did a lovely rendition of “Dreams”. As soon as the song ended, Mr. Schuester turned and picked up a dry erase marker and wrote on the white board – RUMOURS. “Rumours, a classic album by Fleetwood Mac, one of the greatest albums of all time, written as the band was breaking apart, to keep it together. I’m done with the backstabbing and the gossip and we’re channeling all that energy into working together. Pick a song from the album. Put your own spin on it. Simple as that.”

“So, that’s it for today?” Tina asked.

“That’s it.”

Kurt got up and walked back out to the parking lot and got in the Navigator and headed to where Sam was waiting for him. Sam jumped in and Kurt kept driving.

“You missed a nice duet between Mr. Schue and April.”

“Who’s April?”

“Oh, that’s a long story. We don’t have a lot of time right now. I’ll tell you some other day. Anyway, your assignment is to choose a song from the Fleetwood Mac album called Rumours and sing it one day this week.

“Alright.”

Kurt turned a couple of streets before the gas station and drove down a few blocks to an old park that no longer had any playground equipment that no one went to anymore. He pulled up and parked next to a bush on Sam’s side.

“Climb into the backseat.” Kurt opened his door and got in the backseat and slid over and climbed into Sam’s lap. “Since the back windows are tinted, and we’re sitting next to a bush, no one can see us.” He started kissing Sam. “I wanted just a little bit of time with you before I take you to the gas station. I have to drive back to Dalton after I drop you off.” He kissed Sam again. He pulled back and pressed their foreheads together. “I hate leaving you to deal with all of that. It’s so stupid. I wouldn’t blame you if you decide to go ahead and go to Kentucky with your family. That whole thing is making me rethink my plan to go back to McKinley in the fall.”

“Really? You’re going to go somewhere else?”

“I don’t know, Sam. I just got Karofsky’s absolute word that he will leave me and all of the Glee Club alone.”

“Ha.”

“No, for real. I can’t say what happened. But it’s absolutely for real. He’s going to leave all of us alone. The school is going to implement a No Bullying Policy – a real one. Mrs. Huntington is going to make sure of it. The school won’t tolerate any bullying starting in about two weeks.”

“Well that’s good.” Sam leaned forward and started kissing Kurt. “I’m going to miss you. I’m going to stay at the motel this week, but I’ll still call you every night.”

Kurt wrapped his arms around Sam’s neck. “I’ll miss you too. Try to stay strong. Since they’re not rehearsing for Nationals, maybe you can just claim that you need to leave early. Just let your mom
keep your truck in the mornings and tell them you have to walk to work, so you can’t stay after this week if you need to get away from them. One more kiss, then I have to drop you off.”

Kurt turned back toward the school as he left the gas station parking lot. He parked near the door, picked up a copy of *The Muckraker* lying on the ground near the dumpster, and went directly to Coach Sue’s office. He knocked.

“Come in.”

Kurt opened the door and stepped inside.

“Porcelain.”

“Kurt. My name is Kurt. Please call me Kurt.”

“Kurt, why are you here?”

“Because of *The Muckraker*. You came to that meeting today. You backed me last fall. But this! You encouraged students to write rumors about other students. I know you hate Mr. Schuester. You took a job coaching Aural Intensity in an effort to keep him from winning Regionals. I want to know why.”

“Because I want to be the winner at this school.”

“You are as bad as the bullies. I’m giving a copy of this to Mrs. Huntington and I’m adding an addendum to what I will agree to. The teachers and all of the other staff that this school hires will sign the No Bullying document as well. One more incident like this and you will be unemployed.”

“Are you threatening me?”

“No. It’s a statement of fact. This is a waste of ink and paper. What’s written in this is hurting students at this school. This isn’t fun and games. This is libel. It’s defamation of character. It’s encouraging JBI to be a stalker, as if he needs any encouragement. It seems like contributing to the delinquency of a minor to me. If you printed it with school funding, it’s wasting taxpayers’ resources and misallocation of school funding. I can keep coming up with things, but I’m sure that Mrs. Huntington and Mr. Stewardson can do a better job than I can.”

Coach Sue said nothing.

“If you don’t want the students at this school to reach their potential, the you’re in the wrong line of work. Not wanting the Glee Club members to reach their potential is wrong as an educator in this school. Get over yourself and either support the students at this school or quit. Your shenanigans are contemptible. You’re the one that brought about your team’s downfall. You made the choice to endanger Brittany’s life. Just for that alone, I’m sure Mrs. Huntington knows some way to get you fired.”

“Watch your step, mister. You are being insubordinate.”

“I am not your student. I am a taxpayer in this district. I am not afraid of you. It took a DEATH THREAT to get me to leave. Unless you threaten to kill me, I will say what I think needs said. You were all in favor of me putting Karofsky in his place and getting rid of the bullying. Look in the mirror.” Kurt walked out of the room.
After eating dinner with his dad and Carole, he drove back to Dalton. He listened to music at first, but eventually turned it off just to think. His thoughts were jumbled.

*Will Sam leave and go to Kentucky after all?*

*Will Rachel push him until he outs himself?*

*Will Finn slip up and out Sam to get the pressure off Quinn?*

*Will Sue do something stupid because I confronted her?*

*Ugh. Why am I even considering going back there? Maybe we all get used to the crazy we know.*

He eventually gave up trying to figure anything out and turned the music back on. Once he got back to campus, he parked and went up to his room. He changed quickly and headed to the study room to meet his first tutoring client. He had changed the time for both sessions rather than cancel. He knew he’d be up really late getting any written work done that had been assigned during the day.

*I’ll worry about that later. Focus.*

He opened the door to the study room.

Kurt told Mr. Adams about what had been going on at McKinley.

“Less than an hour in that room and I am seriously doubting my sanity for why I am even considering going back there.”

Mr. Adams laughed. “I can imagine so. It sounds like a teen soap opera.”

“It definitely is.”

Mr. Adams handed Kurt a file folder with several sheets of paper in it. Kurt flipped it open to look at the contents.

“Don’t forget that I set up the French placement test for this Friday at 12:30. Take this form with you and your driver’s license in order to be able to take the test. The building and room number are on the paper. The second paper is for you to put on your dash so that you can park near the building to take the test.”

“Got it.”

“Your orientation and registration is a week from Monday in the afternoon. That’s the next set of papers. It’s a packet that you’ll need to read before then. And a second parking pass for that Monday afternoon.”

“Thank you. I’m scared, but excited.”

“I think you’ll find OSU Lima a lot different than high school. A satellite campus of a major college isn’t where the big shots usually end up. I know that sounds elitist and it probably is. But for the most part, the people at the satellite campuses are less apt to be the type to look down on people. Quite a few are likely to be adults who have gone back to school and are quite serious about actually wanting to learn.”
“That sounds nice.”

“You can let me know what you think after you go to the orientation.”

Kurt nodded and stood to leave. “Thank you.”

“O{}o{}o{}o{}

“And after Finn and Quinn finished singing, Rachel fake-praised their performance, and then conceitedly pointed out that she thought her voice and Finn’s sounded better together and that Quinn had sounded better singing ‘Lucky’ with me, which we never did get around to singing last weekend. I still want my redo. Anyway, after that Quinn prohibited Finn from singing with Rachel ever again. According to her, Finn is only allowed to sing duets with her now.”

“Well, I bet that went over well,” Kurt said sarcastically.

“Yeah. Even Mr. Schue spoke up and said that Quinn couldn’t dictate who sang together for Nationals. Quinn made it sound like she’d quit Glee if Finn ends up paired with Rachel.”

“Wow. I thought she was growing up about this whole thing.”

“I think maybe she’s just giving Rachel a taste of her own medicine and Finn’s getting caught in the crossfire. This weekend might be a good time to talk to him, if you’re still thinking about it.”

“I am.”

“Are people still hassling you?”

“The jocks are still spewing insults and shoving me. I’m still getting looks from a lot of other people. No one else is really saying anything to my face, but I see the whispering.

“I wish I had a good answer.”

“You and me both. On another topic, the most unusual thing happened today. I’m seriously doubting Rachel’s sanity. She gave me a pack of Chapsticks and asked me to Prom.”

“To Prom?”

“I turned her down. I told her she wasn’t my type.”

“On so many different levels.”

“No kidding.”

“There’s one good thing about today.”

“Yeah?”

“We’ve been together for a month.”

“Yep. I’m glad you said ‘yes’.”

“Me too. I’m glad you got up the courage to tell me. That would have been really hard since you thought I didn’t like you and I encouraged that false line of thought by avoiding interacting with you outside of Glee.”
“Well, we missing our timing the first time around, but we’re together now.”

“Which makes me very happy.”

“Me too.”

“Unfortunately, I fell behind by missing class on Monday and I have to miss class Friday afternoon to take that French placement test, so I need to get more schoolwork done before I can go to sleep. But I’ll get to see you in two days.”

“Maybe we’ll get time to actually go OUT on a date this weekend.”

“Maybe. Goodnight.”

“Night.”
Friday afternoon after he finished his French placement exam, Kurt walked into the school and almost made it to the choir room when Rachel spotted him.

“Stop it.”

“Stop what?”

“Sam’s cute, but he’s not worth losing Blaine over.”

“Oh, how I’ve missed your insanity,” Kurt said sarcastically.

“He’s wearing your jacket, Kurt. I remember that jacket. You wore it April of last year. You said it was your Earth Day jacket because it was made out of recycled hemp. I know how these things work. When Finn and I used to date, sometimes he’d leave his letterman jacket at my house and I’d wear it to school the next day.”

“You need to bone up on your Fleetwood Mac-ology. When they made *Rumours*, they weren’t speaking to each other. Not even ‘pass the non-dairy creamer’. They only spoke about the music. And it was that focus that allowed them to make their masterpiece.”

“You’re deflecting.”

“No. You’re wasting valuable Glee Club time still focusing on rumors rather than working on a set list for Nationals. Or are you all waiting until the week before or the day before to come up with a set list?”

Kurt walked around her and down the hall the rest of the way to the choir room and went inside. Rachel came in a few minutes later and sang a rousing rendition of “Go Your Own Way.” Finn played the drums while she sang.

Quinn asked, “Don’t you think it’s a little inappropriate that you sang a love song to MY guy?”

“You’re such a hypocrite, you little Miss Perfect Prom Queen. You’re a cheater, who cheats in cheap motels with Sam.”

“Nothing is going on between Sam and I.”

“Enough guys,” Mr. Schue said.

“You know, I blame Sam for all of this,” Santana. “And Rachel too. I blame her.”

“What did I do?” Rachel asked.

“I’m sure you did something.”

“See, I’m with Santana,” Lauren said. “Why doesn’t Sam have anything to say about all of this?”

“Guilt,” Puck chimed in. “That is not cool. They both have boyfriends.”

Sam had finally had it. “Shut UP! I’m not messing around with Quinn. Kurt is not cheating on
Blaine with me. They’ve both been helping me out.”

“Is THAT what we’re calling it now?” Mercedes asked with her eyebrow raised and her voice dripping with sarcasm.

“Wait,” Mr. Schue said. “How were they helping you out?”

Sam stood up, but Kurt started to speak before he did.

“You seem quite well informed, Rachel. How do you know these photos aren’t just photoshopped figments of JBI’s imagination?”

“Quinn was at the motel just last night,” Rachel said. “And because during spring break I saw Quinn at Sam’s and I saw you pull into the garage and like a half-hour later Quinn came out and left. The first time, Sam’s truck was at the motel in front of the room that she went in and you came out of later.”

“So, you’ve been spying on me and Quinn?” Kurt asked.

“Well, technically just Quinn. Finn said she had been acting weird, so I took it upon myself to check up on her during spring break while he was out of town.”

“This is a bunch of GARBAGE!” Sam said. “Neither of them is cheating on anyone with me.” Sam got up and pulled all of the doors to the room closed and moved to the center of the room. He pulled a stool with him and sat on it. He took a deep breath, let it out, and began to speak very quietly and calmly.

“You all are the worst excuses for friends. You are so quick to judge and you don’t even ask questions privately. You all just start accusing and it’s ridiculous.”

“So, set us straight, white boy.”

He looked straight at Mercedes. “First off, you need to think of a new nickname because I don’t like that one.” He ran his hands through his hair and took another deep breath. He closed his eyes and reopened them. “Quinn was babysitting my little brother and sister because I had to work. That is why she was at my house during spring break that day. On Saturday, she was babysitting them at the motel.”

“Your mom works at a daycare, why did someone need to babysit your brother and sister during the day?” Mercedes asked.

“And why would she need to watch two little kids at that run down motel?” Puck asked.

“Fine. You all aren’t going to mind your own business.” He huffed. He kept his voice low as he explained. “My dad lost his job a few months ago. He got on part-time at McDonald’s and I got a second job on the weekends. The bank was going to foreclose on our house. My dad, my mom and me, we were all three doing everything we could to prevent that from happening. I’ve been working over 40 hours a week for a couple of months. The day Quinn came to watch the rugrats, I had to work and my mom and dad had driven to Kentucky for a third interview with a company. The first two interviews were over the phone. Anyway, my mom wanted to see the area, so she took a half-day off work and I needed someone to watch them until I got off from work.”

“And the motel?” Rachel asked.

“That’s where the four of us have been staying this week. Through the help of some people, we got
the bank situation resolved and we sold our house. When Quinn was at the motel with the rugrats the first time, we were cleaning the house. The moving truck had been there in the morning and took everything to Kentucky, but the house needed cleaned before Sunday, which is when the new owners got possession of the house.”

“So, you’re leaving?” Tina asked.

“No. I’m staying. I’m not going to Kentucky with them. They left last night. That’s why Quinn was at the motel last night. She was saying goodbye to them.”

“Why was Kurt there?” Mercedes asked.

“Kurt helped me and my mom load all of the boxes onto the moving truck while the movers loaded the furniture. Quinn was watching them at the motel to keep them out of the way while we were cleaning since there was nothing for them to do and they had been there all morning while we loaded the truck, but she had to leave that afternoon before the three of us finished cleaning the house. Kurt went to the motel to feed the rugrats, and then he brought them back to the house so Quinn could leave on time and my mom and I could finish the cleaning.” Sam looked at Kurt and smiled.

“Kurt isn’t cheating on Blaine with me because Kurt isn’t dating Blaine, despite Rachel’s comment to the contrary and the fact that everyone believed her when she said he was on Monday.”

“What?” Rachel said.

“It’s true that he asked me, Rachel, but I said ‘no.’”

“Why on earth would you say ‘no’?” Rachel asked.

Tina broke in, “Why do you care? Kurt said ‘no’ because he said ‘no’. It’s not really any of your business why.”

“Fine. Those aren’t the only times I’ve see you with Sam,” she said to Kurt.

Kurt just sat there. Sam knew Kurt would never out him.

Tina spoke up. “You said you were staying, but your parents left. Where are you staying?”

“At the Hummel’s.”

“What, dude?” Finn asked. “Why didn’t I know about this?”

Kurt answered. “I don’t know. It was decided a week ago Sunday. I was gone all week and we moved all his stuff this past Friday and you weren’t home when we did it. Obviously, if you had been home, you would have seen us moving Sam’s stuff into the house and I would have made you help us carry the boxes. Maybe no one said anything because everyone thought someone else had told you.”

Sam spoke quietly again. “To answer Rachel’s question, you’ve seen Kurt with me because he’s my best friend and he’s been there for me through the mess of nearly losing our house. Not a one of you noticed anything. Not one of you. You saw me every day. That second job I took – it was delivering pizzas in Westerville. I delivered a stack of pizzas to Dalton one night and in one look, Kurt knew something was wrong. He asked me to come back at the end of my shift. He asked me what was wrong.”

“You hid it from us,” Mercedes said.
“It’s not like I was wearing a neon sign that night I delivered the pizzas. You guys are so caught up in your stupid high school drama that you don’t pay attention to what’s going on around you. I mean, honestly, Rachel, you’re not even dating Finn so what’s it to you what Quinn is doing? She was acting weird, whatever that means, and instead of asking her if something was wrong, you decided to spy on her?”

Kurt said, “I’m assuming that’s how JBI got the photos. He followed you following Quinn. You led him to the information for no good reason.”

“If it weren’t for Kurt, I might just change my mind and go to Kentucky with my parents after this kind of crap. I thought we were at least kind of friends.”

Quinn spoke up. “Rachel, adults ask each other questions when they’re concerned, they don’t spy on them. We’re graduating in a little over a year. Grow up.”

“Why did he ask you to babysit?” Rachel asked Quinn.

“Why is this so important to you other than you want me to slip up and say something that implies that I have some kind of romantic feelings for Sam so that you can try to get your claws back in Finn.”

Rachel didn’t respond.

Quinn continued. “I do not have any romantic feelings for Sam. I never did. He knows that. We dated because we were both single and it was the socially acceptable thing to do. Rachel, you wanted us to date. You set the whole thing up. Finn pushed Sam and Kurt to not sing together and you pushed me to sing with Sam. You and Finn voted for us. We won by two votes – your two votes. You sang a terrible duet so that no one would consider voting for you and you two voted for us insuring that Sam and I would go to Breadstix together – in case we hadn’t gotten the hint that everyone thought we should date.”

Sam just nodded in agreement.

Puck said, “I’m stuck back a little where Rachel told us all that Kurt had finally landed himself the lead Warbler and that they’ve been dating since before spring break. That was just a lie?”

Rachel answered, “The last time I talked to Blaine was a little more than a week before Regionals and he told me he was going to ask Kurt to be his boyfriend.”

“So, not so much a lie, but Rachel jumped to conclusions,” Kurt corrected.

“Sam’s wearing your jacket,” Rachel said.

“A point you made to me in the hallway earlier. The fact that he is wearing my jacket is proof of what? That he wears the same size clothes that I do? That it’s springtime and it’s a little warm for a letterman jacket so he’s wearing a jacket of mine? Didn’t he just say that he’s my best friend? The fact that none of you knows that might be indicative of something. The fact that none of you realized that he was running himself ragged working full time between his two jobs and he was still coming to school every day? Which one of you noticed that he wasn’t turning in his homework?”

“What?” Artie said. “I could have helped you with your schoolwork.”

“At 9:00 at night, which is when I got started on it every night? Kurt helped me get caught up and he’s tutoring me and I’m not flunking anymore.”
“Well, that’s good,” Tina said. “And you’re going to live at the Hummel’s until school gets out?”

“No, until I graduate next year. I don’t want to go to switch schools again, but you all are making me doubt my decision at this point.”

“Something doesn’t add up here. Finn hasn’t gotten upset about any of this,” Mercedes said.

Puck piped in. “Yeah, why hasn’t he been like all mad at Quinn with those photos and don’t bother saying it’s because you trust her.”

Finn remained silent.

“You guys are just not going to let this rest until you’ve gotten your fill of Inquirer – High School Edition are you? God, you’re so nosy,” Kurt exclaimed aggravatedly.

“I will tell you all of it. But so help me, if it spreads outside this room… Kurt is not dating Blaine. He’s dating me.”

“What?” could be heard from various Gleeks.

“No way,” Mercedes said. “There is no way that Burt Hummel would let you move into his house if you and Kurt were dating.”

“Why not?” Finn asked. “My mom let Quinn move in with us when I thought the baby was mine.”

“Because Papa Hummel is too protective to allow his baby boy to live under the same roof with his boyfriend.”

Kurt snarked back, “Well, the joke’s on you then, Mercedes, because Sam is living with us.”

“I’m back at Sam’s gay? Bi?” Puck asked.

“Gay.”

“Since when?” Puck asked.

“Don’t be stupid, Puck. Since forever,” Artie said. “He just didn’t tell anyone.”

“My parents have known for a long time,” Sam said. “I came here and through a series of misunderstandings, I thought Kurt didn’t like me when it was really just Finn bullying Kurt to stay away from me. I didn’t see much point in coming out if Kurt didn’t like me. I thought he wanted me to stay away from him. I figured there wasn’t much point in coming out if all I was going to get was hassled and the guy I liked didn’t like me back.”

“See, I knew this had to be Rachel’s fault somehow,” Santana said. “You pushed him to date Quinn. You and Finn kept him from telling Kurt way back like 6 months ago.”

“Anyway, I wasn’t going to come out until the school implements the new No Bullying policy that Kurt’s been fighting for. It’s supposed to go into effect in a few weeks. So, I’d appreciate it if the lot of you would just SHUT UP about my life.”

“Got it, dude,” Puck said. “But Finn doesn’t seem the list bit surprised. Neither does Quinn.”

“That’s because they knew already, Sherlock,” Kurt spouted sarcastically.

“That would be why Finn hasn’t been upset this week,” Mercedes said.
“Exactly,” Kurt said.

“I hope you’re all happy now. You’ve been completely unsupportive and then to top it off, you believed rumors about me. And you, Rachel, started them,” Sam said. “And I don’t have time to be a part of any more rumor mongering because I have to go to work. Some of us have jobs and lives outside this building.” Sam grabbed his bag and left the room.

Kurt piped up again. “You guys managed to make what was the worst week at the end of three terrible months for him EVEN worse. I’d suggest you spend next week getting a set list together for Nationals and start practicing. You have six weeks to prepare. You may have wowed the Ohio judges with original songs, which were good. But you only had choreography for one song and knowing you all as well as I do, you learned it the week before the competition. That won’t get you very far at Nationals. Some of those choirs have been practicing all school year. If there aren’t any rules against it, you could sing the same two songs and add a third. Another group song that’s choreographed and features a lot of singers. Just ideas. I have to go to work too. Try singing, instead of hurting each other with gossip. And keep your mouths shut about me and Sam. He better not end up hurt because you all can’t keep your mouths shut.” Kurt practically stomped out.

“Dad?”

“Yeah, Kurt.”

“I’m going to be late for my shift. I have to do something on my way there, but I’ll stay until 8:00.”

“Alright. I know you wouldn’t be late if it weren’t for a good reason. I’ll see you as soon as you get here.”

Kurt knocked gently on the open office door.

“Kurt?”

“Hello, Hiram. I’m sorry to show up at your office without an appointment.”

“It’s not a problem. My last appointment for the day left 10 minutes ago. I just have a bunch of paperwork left to do. What can I do for you?”

“Well, first of all I wanted to personally thank you for helping Sam and his family. I’m sure you’ve heard, but Dwight got a good job and all of them, minus Sam, are in Kentucky now.”

“Yes, I did hear, but it is good news that the house situation was resolved. That could have caused them problems for nearly a decade.”

“I came here because I’m really angry with Rachel. I would usually refrain from going to someone’s parents over a personal issue. Here.” Kurt handed him a copy of The Muckraker. “Read this article.”

He looked through it. “So, the school has started a gossip rag instead of a legitimate newspaper. Who’s in charge of this sad excuse for journalism?”

“Coach Sylvester.”

“Alright. That doesn’t tell me why you showed it to me and why you’re angry with Rachel.”
“Rachel provided the information for that article by spying on Quinn.”

“She outed Sam.”

“Only his parents, my parents, Finn, and Quinn knew. She was spying on Quinn to try to catch her cheating on Finn. Everyone at school knows that the newspaper isn’t real news, but there are photographs, which makes this particular article more believable than the others. Of course, the photos are real, so there’s nothing to debate about that part.”

“But Rachel knows how dangerous it is to out someone. Give me a second.” Hiram pulled his phone out and sent a text. “She’ll be here in 10 minutes.”

“Alright. I’m really not a snitch. This was just beyond uncalled for.”

“This could be life-threatening. This is not you being a snitch. You telling me this is completely justifiable.”

Kurt nodded. They sat in silence until Rachel arrived. Hiram worked on some paperwork and Kurt was lost in thought.

_I had no interest in reviving our so-called friendship, but now this coffin is nailed shut._

Rachel knocked on the door lightly.

“Come in, Rachel.”

“Kurt?”

“Have a seat, sweetheart.”

“Yes, Daddy. Why did you want to see me so urgently?”

“Rachel, you put Sam’s life at risk. You OUTED a boy. You know that’s one of the cardinal rules in our home. We don’t out people. Ever.”

Rachel was stunned into silence.

“Rachel, this was the final straw for me. We are not friends anymore. You spread rumors about me and Blaine without verifying any information. And then you sullied my name to the group by making all of them think that I was cheating on Blaine. You took photos of people and they’re in a gossip rag at school. What on earth would possess you to OUT someone?”

“I didn’t take those photos. I thought Quinn was cheating on Finn. I followed her because I wanted evidence.”

“What you want is Finn. You WANTED to prove that you are a better choice for Finn than Quinn is.”

“I am a better choice. She cheated on him and lied about who the baby’s father was. She cheated on Sam.”

“With Finn. You cheated on Finn with Puck. You cheated with Finn on Quinn last year. It’s a four-way cheating mess with Sam, who didn’t cheat on anyone, thrown into the mix.”

“Rachel, sweetheart. What is going on?”
“He’s right, Daddy. It’s a mess. But I love Finn. Quinn is just using him.”

“Then what was that a little over a month ago when you were all over Blaine hoping that he was bisexual and saying to me ‘Who cares about you? I might get someone who can keep up with me vocally and give me slightly Eurasian looking children.’ What was that about if Finn is the love of your life?”

Hiram responded, “Finn is a human being. He gets to decide who he wants to date. It’s not for you to decide for him and then try to find a way to break him up with whoever he’s with.”

“Rachel. What is your biggest dream?” Kurt asked.

“To be Fanny in a Broadway revival of *Funny Girl.*”

“And where do you want to go to college?”

“Juilliard. New York City at least.”

“New York City is your goal.”

“Yes.”

“Finn doesn’t want to live in New York City. Your goals and his goals don’t align. Someone will have to cave or you will have to break up.”

“College isn’t for over a year. He could change his mind.”

“Pigs might grow wings,” Kurt smarted back.

“Sweetheart, you, Dad and I need to have a talk tonight. You need to cancel any plans you might have.”

“Please stop trying to steal Finn from Quinn. It’s just wrong. I don’t think you actually love him, but if you do, let him choose his own path, whether that includes a girlfriend that he chooses or being single. Stop acting like he’s yours to direct. You’re hurting him. And stay away from Sam. You make no sense. He said you asked him to Prom. I’m figuring that you were trying to instigate some type of jealousy from Quinn over Sam? I don’t know, but you and Finn messed me and Sam up the first time.”

“What does that mean?” Hiram asked.

“You can explain it, but don’t leave out important information, or I will cut in and supply it.”

Rachel explained her actions during the duet competition.

Hiram spoke after she finished. “I think we need to have some family counseling sessions with your therapist.”

“I think that’s a great idea,” Kurt said. “Although, I’m not sure her therapist tells her anything but whatever it is that Rachel wants to hear because she keeps acting like a spoiled, self-centered, diva at school. I wish you the best, but we’re through, Rachel. Unless you get some serious help and change your ways, I’m not spending any time around you if I can help it. You just keep hurting me and the people I care about.” Kurt got up and left Hiram’s office and headed to the shop.
Kurt finished his shift at the shop and headed home. He got there just a few minutes before he expected Sam to arrive. He was in the kitchen warming up their food when Sam came in. Sam dropped his backpack on the bottom step and went in the bathroom and washed his hands before heading into the kitchen.

Kurt was standing right inside the kitchen and Sam walked right into his awaiting arms. He let Kurt hold him. Kurt waited until Sam relaxed and then moved his hand and ran it through Sam’s hair. Sam lifted his head up from Kurt’s shoulder and kissed Kurt gently.

“Thank you.”

“For what?” Kurt asked.

“For everything. Just being here for me.”

“Well, you’re welcome. But my being here with you is why your life is so complicated now.”

“Nope. Stop thinking like that. Being with you makes my life better.”

*I will not argue with him.* Kurt kissed him. “Alright. Do you want to eat? I warmed our food up.”

“Yeah.” He let go of Kurt, picked his plate up, and headed into the dining room to sit down.

Kurt sat down next to him. They ate in silence and put their plates in the dishwasher. Kurt turned it on and headed up the stairs. “I need to tell you what I did after Glee.”

Sam grabbed his bag and headed upstairs behind Kurt. “That sounds bad.”

“It probably was on some level, but I don’t even care.”

Kurt let Sam walk through the door first, shut the door behind them, and locked it. Sam put his backpack on the floor next to his side of the bed.

“I’m pretty worn out. How about we shower and talk about it afterwards?”

“Sure.”

They showered together, but other than a few kisses, they just washed up and got out. They put on pajamas and lay under the covers on their backs in the dark.

“So, after school Monday, I went to Coach Sue’s office and confronted her. I told her that the gossip rag she started was grounds for her being fired and that I sent a copy of *The Muckraker* to Mrs. Huntington.”

“Alright. I’m assuming she didn’t find it to be acceptable.”

Kurt snorted. “That’s one way of putting it. Coach Sue will be lucky to be employed by the beginning of next week.”

“I see.”

“After I left the school today, I drove to Hiram’s office and I showed him *The Muckraker*.”

“Okay.”
“I told him that Rachel actions outed you. I told Rachel that she and I weren’t friends anymore.”

“I see.”

“I also implied that her therapist was a sham and I ratted her out about what she did to the two of us in the fall, what she said to me about Blaine, what she’s been doing to and with Finn in regards to Quinn, and I mentioned her asking you to Prom.”

“Alright.”

“I was angry and I acted impulsively. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have done that behind your back.”

“Well, I don’t feel like you did something behind my back. What she did hurt you as well. So, if you felt justified going to her dad about her behavior, then that was your choice. She’s done a lot more to hurt you the last couple of years than she has to me. If you had told me what you were going to do, I wouldn’t have tried to stop you. She told people you were cheating on someone just as much as she said that Quinn was cheating on Finn.”

“But you’re the one that was outed. When considering ways to come out, this would not be on the list. She took your autonomy away. And she put you in danger. And she proved what a self-centered brat she is. She sat there and told her dad that she was a better choice for Finn. And when I pointed out that Finn has no desire to live in a big city, she said that he has time to change his mind. She didn’t even listen. She never does, not even in front of her dad. Anyway, it’s over with her. And I’m so close to being done with Mercedes. She really hurt me last fall and I forgave her even thought she never apologized, but today, she didn’t even try to give me the benefit of the doubt. She believed I would cheat on someone.”

Sam took Kurt’s hand. “I know. I’m not sure what to think right now. I’m still pretty numb from this whole week. Too much. Just too much.”

“I know. I’ll understand if you change your mind and want to go to Kentucky when school starts in the fall. I won’t break up with you because of that. I can drive three hours to see you. Long distance isn’t easy, but I think we could do it.”

“Probably, but I’m staying here.”

Kurt reached out searching for Sam’s hand and took it and squeezed it and then interlaced their fingers.

“What’s going to happen to Coach Sue?”

“I’m assuming that after Mrs. Huntington chews her up and spits her out that she’ll be on her best behavior and somehow she will do something to cover her butt about The Muckraker. It doesn’t matter. She had asked me to rejoin the Cheerios for the fall and offered me the co-captain spot with Santana. That’s certainly not happening. I’m done with Rachel. I’m done with Coach Sue. Mercedes has slid down the list to acquaintance because if she thinks I’m the cheating type, then she doesn’t know me well enough to be considered a friend.”

“You said you’re not going to cheer. I’m not going to play football next year either.”

“This is why I set you free. It didn’t matter how much I liked you and wanted us to be friends and maybe more, I couldn’t put you in the position you’re in now.”

“I appreciate that. But that was then and this is now and everyone already knows now. It won’t matter what Coach Sue says or does. Those photos are real and that’s that. People are going to make
their decision based on that. I’m bisexual and I’m two-timing my boyfriend with someone else’s girlfriend or I’m just a bisexual slut, sexing people up in a run-down motel.”

Kurt rolled over onto his side and gently put his hand on the side of Sam’s neck and ran his thumb down jaw and turned Sam’s face toward him. “I’m sorry.”

Sam rolled on his side to face him. “Stop, please. Stop apologizing. You’ve been nothing but amazing. You’ve always done what was in my best interest. Please.” He slid forward and kissed Kurt. “Please don’t apologize for something you didn’t do. None of this is your fault. You gave me a ride home from work. You helped my family move. You fed my brother and sister that day. You were helping me. The only other person in that group that ever did anything to help was asked. Yes, Quinn helped, but my mom asked her since she knew that Quinn already partially knew what was going on and hadn’t said anything to anyone at school. YOU are the only person who voluntarily helped me. YOU noticed I was fraying at the seams. No more apologies for being an amazing person.” He kissed Kurt again.

“Okay. I just wish I could fix this somehow.”

“I know you do. That’s because you’re a truly decent human being.” He kissed Kurt again.

“I know we can’t fix anything right now. How about we just snuggle?”

Sam’s tone of voice changed. “I have something thing to tell you first.”

“You sound excited.”

“I am. It’s amazing and the best news.” He kissed Kurt.

“So, tell me. Now, you’ve got me curious.”

“I got into the dual-credit program. I’m set to go to the orientation a week from Monday, just like you. Miss Pillsbury gave me a packet of information today.”

“That’s perfect! That is the best news.”

“So, my week wasn’t all bad. I’m nervous though.”

“Me too. But we’ll face it together.”

Sam kissed Kurt, and then turned over and scooted back. Kurt arranged himself and scooted as close to Sam as he could. “We’ll work on all of it. Mrs. Huntington will help us.”

Sam laughed.

“What’s funny?”

“I would have loved to be a fly on the wall to hear what went on when Mrs. Huntington confronted Coach Sue.”

“Oh. That would have been something to see.” Kurt kissed Sam’s shoulder and nuzzled in behind him and got comfortable.

It didn’t take long for them to fall asleep.
Early Sunday afternoon, Kurt was standing behind Burt on the Karofsky’s porch. He had photocopied and tallied the total of the damage due to the bullying. There were so many pages that he used a hole punch on them and fastened them into an inexpensive two-pocket folder with center paper clasps. Burt rang the doorbell and Paul Karofsky opened the door a few minutes later. He stepped back and allowed Burt and Kurt to enter their foyer. He shut the door behind them.

“Please, come sit at the table. Esther and David are already waiting.”

They followed Paul into the dining room. Kurt waited for Burt to sit down and sat down next to him. He placed the folder on the table.

“Please help yourselves if you’d like something to drink.” He glanced toward a glass pitcher of tea, another of lemonade, and another of ice water, along with several types of cans of soda.

Kurt just kept his hands in his lap.

“So, I’m assuming that the folder you’ve put on the table contains the copies of the receipts.”

“Yes, sir. I’ve kept them organized by the type of damage. For example, there’s a set of dry cleaning bills, textbooks, clothes that I had to replace, and objects I had to replace. I also made a list of assignments I had to redo or lost points for turning them in late and extra credit assignments I did to make up for the lost points.”

“My first response to this is how strange it is that you kept track of so many things.”

“I realize that it’s strange. This isn’t 100% complete. I didn’t keep records at first. But when I started to realize that my checking account was never going up as much as it seemed like it should considering how much I worked and I really looked at my expenditures on things I was CHOOSING to spend money on, there was a big discrepancy. I’d add up things like going to the movies or renting a movie or ordering a pizza. I’d look through my online purchases, things like that. And when my spending was staying within my budgeting limit, I began to realize that my expenditures list didn’t include replacing my Geometry book or having my coat dry cleaned three times in the same month. I was using my debit card to pay for things that weren’t on my planned expenditures. That’s when I started keeping the receipts from the dry cleaning and replacement items separate from my planned expenses.”

“I see.”

“So, this isn’t everything, but it covers about two years. Obviously, there haven’t been any additions since I left McKinley last fall.”

“May I look at it?” Mrs. Karofsky asked.

“Yes, ma’am.” Kurt slid the folder to her politely.

She began looking through the lists. “There’s a lot of clothing purchases. Some quite pricey. May I ask why you continued to wear expensive clothing to school when the risk of having it damaged was so high?”

“I suppose that’s a legitimate question, but I guess I have a similar question for you. Why don’t you wear clothes from K-Mart or Wal-Mart?”

“Mostly because I don’t like the choices and they don’t hold up well a lot of the time. I’d rather buy something nicer that will hold up longer and I like better.”
“I think you’ve answered your own question. I wasn’t asking my dad to fund my wardrobe, although he did buy me things that I asked for on holidays. I worked as soon as I was old enough and I trained in the shop and started working on the cars as soon as I was old enough. I’ve worked since I was 14. I chose how to spend my money. I didn’t really start buying much in the way of clothing until I was about 16. But I worked hard and I figured that if I wanted to buy a $30 shirt, I should be able to do that. Not every shirt I owned was that expensive, but some were.”

“I see.”

“One thing I couldn’t quantify really is the amount of time all of this cost me. I spent a lot of time getting stains out of clothing. I spent time redoing schoolwork. I spent time doing the extra credit. I spent time going the long way around to avoid running into certain people in the hallways. I would wait until I saw someone who didn’t hate me to follow into the bathroom so maybe I’d escape without a swirlie or a wedgie or without my homework being dumped into the sink and the water turned on. The mental toll the bullying caused is very high. I can’t quantify how I’m afraid to go into public bathrooms. I can’t quantify how I won’t go out alone after dark. I can’t quantify the heart racing that happens when I hear a regular phone ring.”

“Why would the phone ringing cause your heart to race?” she asked.

“How many times have you picked up your phone and someone suggested to you that killing yourself would make the world a better place?”

“That’s terrible,” Esther said.

“That’s homophobia. That’s my life. I got notes in my locker telling me I will burn in hell. I got notes telling me to kill myself.”

“That’s really awful,” Paul agreed.

“Well, it is what it is and it’s my life. There is a large group of people who are vocally opposed to my existence. Many of them seem to think that it’s a choice. Do you seriously think that I would CHOOSE to be hated to the point that I have been? If there were some magic ‘off’ switch that I could push and be straight, don’t you think I would have pushed it growing up here?”

“I don’t know,” Esther said.

“Maybe you should do some research. Not just reading some verses in a book written thousands of years ago when people thought the earth was flat.”

“Don’t be disrespectful of our beliefs,” she said.

“Don’t be disrespectful of my experiences. People like you teach your children to hate instead of love. Do you really think you can hate people into believing what you do? Beating them up and covering them in bruises doesn’t seem to fit what Jesus taught. I may not be a Christian, but I can read. He said things like ‘love your neighbor as yourself’. I’m not sure how you can hate gay people while loving them the way you love yourself. Unless you hate yourself and are into self-flagellation like back in the dark ages, I’m pretty sure you don’t do things to yourself to end up with broken bones. So your loving your neighbor directive seems to be ignored from my point of view.”

“I think we should focus on these receipts,” Paul said.

“Sure, Mr. Karofsky,” Kurt said. “They’re self-explanatory and I added a page at the back with the totals. Keep in mind that none of those receipts is from my dad for property damage that he’s paid for.”
“Property damage?” Paul asked.

“Yes, the roof, spray paint graffiti removal, things like that. And I know David said that he wasn’t part of the roof prank, but I was just pointing out that the hatred cost my dad as well, even though he’s not gay. And you certainly can’t think that he did something to make me gay. He’s into hunting, sports, fixing up cars – you know, manly stuff. And since my mom died when I was 8, I don’t think it’s plausible to blame her.”

“I’m sorry for your loss,” Esther said.

“Thanks. Anyway, do you have any questions for me about the costs?”

“It seems pretty self-explanatory,” she said.

“Can I see it?” David asked.

His mother passed to him and he looked through it.

“I don’t have this much money.”

“I figured not. I didn’t hear you mention that you have a job.”

“I don’t. I usually just do lawn work in the summers for cash.”

“I work 8-12 hours a week at the shop now that I’m at Dalton and I’ve been tutoring this semester starting in mid-February. I added more clients after spring break to earn more money, so between the two I’m working about 15-18 hours a week now. But I pay my own car insurance, my phone bill, gas, and as I said earlier, my discretionary spending like clothing and entertainment.”

“No that it’s any of my business, but why doesn’t your dad pay for that stuff?”

“Cancer bills and funerals are expensive. He had finally paid all of that off by the time I was about 14. Then there was the loan for putting a new roof on. We didn’t have the savings to pay for that. So he paid on that for a couple of years. Then he was in the hospital last fall in a coma for a while. He’ll be paying those bills for a while. Now that the school district reimbursed the Dalton tuition, that helps. He never said, but I’m pretty certain that he had taken out a loan to pay my tuition this semester.”

Burt nodded. “Not quite yet, but that’s where it was headed before the advocate got McKinley to pay Dalton. I would have paid it off eventually. You being safe is more important than money.”

“Anyway, I don’t really feel comfortable with a lot of people having access to that folder. My dad didn’t even know about it until a few days ago. He found out when you did. He mentioned then that he didn’t know a lot of what was going on. I did what I could to protect him from all of this. But here it is, out in the open. I don’t want this information to leave this table. I don’t want David to talk about how he is making amends. I don’t want you to tell the ladies at your church how much I paid for a shirt. I don’t need any more gossip to deal with.” No more rumors.

“Yes, of course,” Esther said. “I understand.”

“And I will do the same. I won’t go spreading it around that David is being forced to repay the damages. I know that would not go over well. My intent is not to get him bullied along with me. My goal is for the bullying to end.”

“Well, David won’t be participating in it anymore,” Paul said. “He’ll be too busy working as soon as
he can find a job.”

“I can’t think of anything else we need to discuss,” Kurt said. *I’m so done.*

“I’ll see them out, Dad,” David said and stood up waiting for them. He led them to the door and stepped outside.

Kurt spoke quietly. “I really need to tell my Dad the truth. Otherwise, none of this makes any sense.”

*Please.*

David took a deep breath. “Fine, but no one else.”

“I wouldn’t have told anyone anyway. I know I told Blaine, but you scared me. I didn’t know whether you’d push past the kiss. I was terrified that you’d try something more than that.” *Like rape me.*

“I know. It was stupid. Anyway, it’s over. And now, my life is a disaster. I have to go back inside.” He turned and walked inside.

Kurt went down the stairs and got in Burt’s truck.

“*o* *o* *o* *o*”

“What was that about?” Burt asked after Kurt was back in the truck.

“Me telling him that I’m going to tell you the truth.”

“The truth? You’ve been lying about something?” Burt pulled out of the driveway and headed back home.

“No. Yes. I just kept his secret. A secret that someone else found out and made things worse.”

“You’re not making much sense.”

“David’s gay. And now Santana figured it out. If he doesn’t play her happy boyfriend, she’s going to tell his mother – the one that you just met that volunteers at a conversion camp in the summers. David’s not 18. She can force him to go.”

“Oh, God. This is a huge mess.”

“I found out last fall because I ran after him and confronted him about knocking my phone across the hallway. I chased him into the locker room and screamed at him. He told me to shut up and leave him alone, but I was worked up and I was fed up. I kept up the yelling and I insulted him. He kissed me.”

“He what?”

“You heard me. He freaked me out. I told Blaine, which in hindsight was a bad idea, but you had just gotten out of the hospital and I was afraid. He was the only person I could think of to talk to that didn’t go to McKinley. Blaine came with me to the school and we tried to talk to David, but Blaine went about it all wrong and came at him in the outdoor stairwell. It was after that confrontation that David threatened to kill me if I told anyone. When we sat in the office and I was asked point blank why he had threatened to kill me, I lied. I wasn’t going to out him. I had already outed him to one person in my fear.”

“So, Blaine came in, put his nose where it didn’t need to be, and David threatened to kill you if you
told anyone else.”

“That’s pretty much it. But I was dumb enough to tell Blaine and have him come with me. If I had just kept my mouth shut and come up with some other potential solution, none of the other stuff would have happened. And now he needs at least make it to his 18th birthday and preferably graduation without his mother finding out that he’s gay, and Santana who is the ultimate bitch knows. And before you ask, his birthday is in August. He told me at the meeting.”

“His parents aren’t happy. I’m imagining that he’s going to be grounded until he moves out. That’s not going to help. Having to spend more time with them will not make it easier on him.”

“Nothing is going to make it easier on him. He doesn’t want to be gay. He doesn’t want to be disowned. He actually did research on conversion therapy hoping to find evidence that it worked, so he could go and be straight by the end of the camp.”

“So, part of what you were going on about in there was just to point out how wrong his mother is about everything.”

“People like her make me so angry. They act like they speak for their God when they completely disregard what their prophet taught. They treat their holy book like a buffet. It’s a ‘take-what-you-want-and-ignore-the-rest’ system that makes me angry. Either call yourself a Christian and do what Jesus taught or just don’t bother using that adjective to describe yourself.”

“I get it, kiddo. But just let it go with them for now. They have a lot to contend with finding out that their son has done so many wrong things. He has a lot to deal with.”

“That’s why I told you. As much as him living with us is not an option, I wanted you to know that there’s every possibility that if Santana goes through with it at any point in time, he’ll run or he might just try to kill himself. I’d rather him run to our house and you help him find some place to go, even Carole’s family’s farm. Somewhere he could go until he’s 18. I handled things badly even though I did it in absolute terror and with no malice in mind, I don’t want him to end up dead over this.”

“I get it. Tell him to come to us if things go south. I’ll take him out to Carole’s family’s farm until we can figure out what to do.”

“Thanks.”

“Yeah.” He let out a heavy sigh.

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“So what did you think of that website?” Kurt asked as he entered their room when he got back home.

“It has a lot more information that I thought it would, even with you telling me how cool it was. Having all of that data in one place is really cool. McKinley should make students take a class like you’re taking.” Sam clicked the browser window shut, powered the laptop down, and closed it.

“Maybe some day. If Miss Pillsbury and Coach Beiste can get the bullying under control, maybe they can start to work on some type of curriculum improvement.”

“Maybe.”

“So, you’ve already sent your homework to your teachers, right?”
“Yeah, I sent in the last couple while you were gone.”

“Perfect. How about a drive out to the lake? We can go hiking.”

“Sounds fun.”

“You’re not going to tease me?”

“About what?”

“Never mind. I bet I have a pair of boots that will fit you. Let me look.” Kurt looked through the shoe racks in his closet. “I got these and wore them a few times, but then I found some I really loved that had the studs on them, and I quit wearing these. They’re not outlandish or anything.” He came out of the closet carrying a pair of black combat boots. “Those aren’t the ones I was looking for, but see if they’re comfortable – if you like them. You don’t have to like them.”

“They’re black combat boots. What’s not to like?”

So adorable. “Well, then try them on while I look for the ones I was originally looking for.” He went back in his closet. He moved some stuff around. “Aha! They were in a box, not on the rack. He brought out a boot box and opened it. “My dad got me these for camping and hiking. I wore them for a while, but then I found those ones I wear a lot, the brown and green ones, which are both stylish and functional.”

Sam laughed. “Two for one. Always a good deal.”

God, he’s cute. That smile. Focus.

“So, if you like these and they fit, they can be yours for the low, low price of a kiss, or 10, or 100.”

“Hmm. The price seems to fluctuate a lot. Is it one or 10 or 100?” He took the combat boot off and started to put the hiking boot on.

“Depends on the type of kiss.” He winked at Sam and turned to go back into the closet to get his brown and green boots, sat on the edge of the bed, and put them on.

“Well, I think you’ll have to demonstrate each one before I can know whether the cost is reasonable.”

“I can arrange that.” He got up and stood in front of Sam and pushed him back on the bed and straddled him and leaned down and started placing soft gentle kisses on his neck. “A hundred those, placement is your choice.”

“I see.”

He leaned down again and kissed Sam on the lips, somewhere between chastely and French kissing. He sat back up on his knees. “Ten of those.”

“And the other type?”

Kurt rolled his eyes. “That one you’ll have to imagine.” He winked and got up before Sam could pull him back down.

“Hey, now.” Sam laughed.

Kurt grabbed his hands and pulled him to standing. “Come on. Let’s go out to the lake.” He stepped back in his closet and handed Sam a zip-up hoodie. He grabbed a jacket for himself, slipped it on,
and they headed out.

“I didn’t know there was a lake like this around here,” Sam said.

“I like to come out here because there really aren’t that many people who come down to this area. Most people just come here for the beach area and to swim in the lake, not to hike. And this time of year, no one is here to swim at all, so we have the place to ourselves pretty much. And best of all, the jocks like to hang out at the pool because it has a water slide and a much bigger lake nearby.” Kurt turned away from the lake and beach and drove down a ways and pulled into one of the RV camping area spots since they were mostly vacant.

They got out and headed back into the wooded area. Kurt started walking and Sam walked along next to him.

“There’s not really anything here except trees and normal stuff you’d find in the woods, but it’s nice and quiet. I like to just sit out here and think sometimes. You’re the only person I’ve brought here.” He reached out for Sam’s hand and interlaced their fingers.

Sam did his best Sean Connery accent and said, “Well, I’m quite honored to be your first guest to such a lovely spot in nature.”

Kurt hip checked him. “You goof.”

He continued with accent, “I daresay not. I’m a gentleman among gentlemen.”

“What you are is adorable.” He started walked a little more quickly and pulled Sam along behind him. He stopped and turned and walked another 20 feet or so and sat on a fallen tree.

“So, have we reached our destination?”

“For a while. Straddle the tree.”

Sam flipped one leg over to the other side and put it on the ground. Kurt straddled the tree as well, facing Sam. He wrapped his legs around Sam, scooted closer, and leaned in. Sam reached out and wrapped his arms around Kurt to steady him since he was mostly just balancing on the tree. Kurt wrapped his arms around Sam as well and just held him close. It was quiet enough that he could hear Sam’s heart beating.

Is it too soon? What if he freaks out? “Is this okay?”

“It’s great. It’s really peaceful in here and I always like cuddling with you.”

Kurt sat back up straight and looked at him and smiled. “I should have asked and not assumed.”

Sam continued with impression and his silly gallantry. “Surely, you know by now that I am totally smitten and that I enjoy all opportunities that present themselves to be close to you.”

“Smitten, you say?”

“Why yes, smitten.” He leaned forward and kissed Kurt. “Surely you know the meaning of the word being a posh prep school boy.”

“Then it seems that we find ourselves in the same state. I’ll rephrase in more modern vernacular just to be clear. I love you, Sam.”
Sam dropped the accent and the silliness. “I love you too, Kurt.” He leaned forward and kissed him.

The kiss started slow and gentle, but moved to passionate and needy and back to sweet and loving. When they broke apart, Kurt pressed his forehead against Sam’s.

“Wow.”

“Yeah. You are a really good kisser.”

“You are quite skillful as well,” Kurt teased and kissed him quickly on the lips.

Sam slipped his hand up behind Kurt’s head and pulled him back in for more kisses. “I am beginning to wonder your motivation for bringing me out to the woods to go hiking though. I’m thinking it’s more like bringing me out to the woods to make out with me.” He kissed up Kurt’s neck.

“Kissing, hiking, close enough,” he said as he restarted the kissing.

Sam laughed and enjoyed their kissing too much to bother with a sassy retort.

“Wow.”

“You boys enjoy your hike?”

They both broke out laughing.

“It was great, Dad.”

“Yeah, it was really nice. Very peaceful, sir – Burt.”

“If you say so,” Burt chuckled.

“We do,” Kurt said as they headed up the stairs.

“Dinner’s in 20 minutes, you two,” they heard as they hit the first landing, still laughing.

“I see.” Mr. Adams said.

“I think he has a point, but it’s a limited one. He’s right that I shouldn’t automatically dislike them, but I think the situation is completely different. No one is attempting to force me to be gay. I just am.
While people are forcing the guys here to do things because it suits the family, it’s a choice they make to follow their families’ rules. Of course I realize that not following those rules could get them disinherited and leave them penniless. I’m not heartless to their situations, but that’s not an excuse to not learn about other viewpoints and beliefs. It’s like being mega rich is a cult. It’s insane. The school needs to address it in some way. There are people whose voices are being suppressed, whose lives are being decided for them like they’re slaves, and this school encourages that.”

“Wow. You’re not holding back anymore are you?”

“Actually I am. I hold back every moment of every day that I’m in this building. I’m going to show you something.” He took his phone out and showed Mr. Adams the photo of him in the outfit he had shown Sam.

“I see.”

“I realized how much of myself I had suppressed close to six weeks ago when Sam came back into my life. I was this close to giving up myself to be accepted here. I had done what you said, mostly. I did actually try to fit in. I don’t fit in anywhere, not in Lima and definitely not here.”

“So, you’re giving up?”

“I am. There are five weeks left of school and the last week is finals. Honestly I would gladly take my finals during reading week and just leave. I have loved the academics here. I’m hoping that the classes at OSU Lima are as well-taught as the ones here. I’m not looking forward to spending another year in Lima, but honestly after doing all of the work in that college prep class, I’m trying to come to terms with the fact that if I don’t get a scholarship to a school in New York City, I’m going to have to choose a state school here in Ohio if I want to go to college without borrowing enough money to buy two small houses or one really nice one.”

“I see.”

“I’m sure that a lot of the guys in the course with me are equally despondent because they’ve had to go to those websites and have the information right in front of their faces about the careers they want to choose while they spend their time pretending to be excited about following the path their dearest father has laid out for them. I know at least one student who wants to be an orchestra director, not a doctor. When it comes time for him to take this class next year, I can’t imagine him finding it very pleasant either.”

“Maybe we need to offer more mental health support in non-counseling situations.”

“That’s probably a good idea. No one will come in here and talk to you about their problems unless they’re forced to like I was or until they get to the breaking point and they don’t see any other option. Maybe a seminar like this college prep one, but given in the fall for freshman and transfer students on how to deal with disappointment, grief, exhaustion, and frustration. Something everyone has to take so that no one is singled out as mentally ‘weak’. And maybe visiting your office should be mandatory so that everyone sees that seeing you is helpful and no one feels bad about coming back.”

“Good idea.”

“Thanks. And I wanted to tell you again how much I appreciate you telling me about the advocate. Without that intervention, I’d have gone back to McKinley already because I refuse to let my dad take out a loan to keep me here. A semester here is as much as the tuition for a semester of college at a state school.”
“You’re welcome – again. I just have one last thing to inform you of and then you’re free to go. Mrs. Huntington will be here on Friday to meet with you at lunch. Please head back to the conference room where you spoke with her before as soon as you grab your lunch tray. She knows that you’ll be eating while she’s here. She specifically asked me not to pull you from class again.”

“I’ll be there.”

“This is the fourth day in a row that she’s not shown up. Finn hasn’t been staying afterwards either, but I didn’t think about it Monday because he didn’t go to school Monday either. I figured he was sick. But he’s gone to school the rest of the week, just not to Glee.”

“I’m going to call Finn later. I’m looking forward to tomorrow. I’ll be waiting for you when you get home from work.”

“I’m looking forward to seeing you too. I miss you. It’s lonely here without you. Your family is nice, but the lack of rugrats is disturbing. I’m not used to having so much peace and quiet.”

Kurt laughed. “You’re used to a ruckus and I’m used to absolute silence if I’m not the one making noise. Growing up as an only child is very different, especially with only one parent. I spent a lot of time alone. Maybe that’s why I sing so much – filling in some of the empty space with music.”

“Well, I’m looking forward to finally singing our duet. Tomorrow evening. It’s happening.”

“Yes, sir,” Kurt teased. “We WILL sing.” He laughed.

“Darn right we will.”

After Mrs. Huntington finished speaking, Kurt confirmed, “So, Coach Sue has been removed from the bullying prevention taskforce, but she was not removed from her position at the school? And she’s being forced to hold an assembly pointing out the dangers of not fact-checking, which will double as an anti-plagiarism seminar and will be part of the anti-bullying assembly?”

“Exactly,” Mrs. Huntington replied. “She’s had time this week to put it together and I just sat through the presentation this morning. I will be there Monday to make sure she follows the lesson plan and the PowerPoint. The superintendent will not fire her. She has won too many titles and too much money for the school. But she won’t be part of the taskforce. She’s being sent to counseling and sensitivity training.”

Kurt about choked. “Like that will do any good.”

“It’s actually more likely that Mr. Schuester will be the one that won’t be returning in the fall.”

“Why?”

“He’s not actually licensed to teach Spanish. His teaching area is actually history, but with the push for more STEM classes, student enrollment in history classes dropped and the Spanish teacher had quit, so he was issued a temporary license to teach until the school found someone to replace him, but they didn’t actually bother to try. But now that all of the teachers’ credentials have been called into question, the school will have to either offer fewer Spanish classes or hire a licensed Spanish teacher.”
“I see. I did wonder why he taught Spanish when he has such a horrible American accent.”

“There’s actually a big shake up coming. New scheduling system, new principal, several new teachers – quite a few changes.”

“It will be interesting to see how it all pans out. Who’s the new principal?”

“Coach Beiste.”

Kurt laughed. “Oh, wow. Perfect. She’s the perfect choice. I didn’t know she had a background in administration.”

“She does. She has a Master’s Degree in school administration.”

“That’s going to be fantastic. Next year is looking up already.”

She smiled. “I’m glad you’re pleased. Coach Sue will actually be teaching in a classroom for the first time in a long time.”

“Teaching what?”

“Life skills for the special ed department that will exist next year. The school has been in violation of the No Child Left Behind act for quite some time. That will no longer be the case. Her actual teaching credentials are for secondary special education. She has a PE endorsement. She’ll still be teaching some specialized PE classes in the mornings – pilates and an aerobics class. Those new classes will be options for PE credits instead of the traditional PE class.”

“That’s surprising. And those PE options sound great. I would have taken both of those. Her hatred for Mr. Schueuter runs deep. If he’s gone, maybe she won’t hate the Glee Club anymore.”

“One can hope.”

“Or there may be no Glee Club to hate since he’s the only teacher I can think of who’s interested in being the staff sponsor.”

“We’ll see I guess.”

“So a definite upside and maybe a huge loss, if we lose Glee Club.”

“There’s still time.”

The warning bell sounded. “Thanks for coming to see me. I have to get to class.” He picked his tray up and headed out the door.

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Later that afternoon after he had returned to Lima, Kurt knocked on Finn’s bedroom door.

“Come in.”

“Oh, hey, Kurt.”

“Hey. I just came down here to see if you’re okay. Sam said you missed school Monday and that you haven’t been in Glee all week.”

“Yeah. Neither has Rachel. It’s part of our punishment for stalking Quinn and taking those photos.”
“You were part of that? I mean I knew you were there at least once because there were photos of you and Rachel in your truck.”

“Yeah. I went with her to the motel a few times to stake it out. I was with her and I took photos at the motel, just not the ones ended up in *The Muckraker*.”

“So, you’ve been grounded back to the stone age? I tried calling, but your phone just went to voicemail and you never returned my calls.”

“Burt decided not to take my phone away from me. I’m just only allowed to answer calls that are from him or Mom or call the two of them.”

“I think I’m probably in that allowed group, but we can check.”

“Alright. Quinn’s mad at me. And Rachel’s not talking to me.”

“I see.”

“She’s not actually allowed to talk to me, but she gave a note to Tina to give to me to tell me that she can’t talk to me right now. It actually makes things a little easier. I knew Rachel was trying to get me back. I went to see a counselor this week. And Burt gave me another ‘I matter’ speech. Only this time it was more about how I need to find someone who values me and my interests as much as her own and how I’m not a trophy to be won or shown off – or something like that.”

“He makes a good point. Those two have played tug-o-war with you for what, two years? You deserve better than that.”

“You liked me for me.”

“Yeah, I did. You’re a good-looking, nice guy, who let himself get swayed by a few too many idiot jocks over the years, but deep down you’re a nice guy. I told you that was what brought on the crush. You were the first guy to be sort of, kind of, decent to me in high school. You’ll find a girl that likes you for you too. I just don’t think that girl is Quinn or Rachel.”

“I thought about that thing you said about Mike and Tina. And I’m not going to be homophobic on purpose anymore. But if you see me acting homophobic, try not to get mad and try to explain it to me, okay? When you used the Mike and Tina example, it really helped me think about it. I will stop doing things that are homophobic. I promise. You might just have to help me figure out what all of them are.”

“I can do that. And thanks. That means a lot to me.”

“And Mom made me watch that movie that you decorated the basement like with her the other night. I get it now. It wasn’t gay. It was like a theme room, but I just didn’t get the theme. That was on me for getting upset about it, though. I should have just said that I didn’t get it. If we had sat down and watched the movie or I had given you a chance to explain or if I had paid attention and asked what the fabric board or whatever it was called was for, that whole situation could have ended differently.”

“I appreciate you saying that. I also failed as decorator because when you refused to participate in the process, I should have gone to Carole and either told her that you wouldn’t help or asked her to help me in your place. I was supposed to get it done by a deadline and you weren’t helping, but I shouldn’t have done it on my own. I broke the cardinal rule of decorating a shared space – doing it all myself. So, we each had blame to share, but I accept your admission of your part of the blame.”

“Thanks. Mom and I have spent a lot of time talking this week. She talked to me about how real men
stand up for what’s right. We talked more about if things were the other way around – if I was gay and you were straight. She asked if I thought you would defend me and I told her yes. When I had to admit to myself that you are more of a man, more of an adult that I am – that cut deep. I thought back to when you dumped the slushie on yourself so I wouldn’t have to do it, I realized that’s what she’s asking about. What you said that day – that I wouldn’t do that for you. I kept acting like you should ‘man up’ and stop dressing girly, but it’s not how you dress that makes you a man or mature I should say. It’s how you act.”

“That’s a lot of progress in one week, Finn.”

“Yeah, it’s amazing how much time you have to think when your mother takes all of your electronic devices away and spends all evening talking to you for four days in a row.”

Kurt laughed. “Your mom is a smart lady.”

“Yeah, I know. But her being right all the time sucks.”

Kurt laughed again. “Just remember that she’s had more than twice as long to make mistakes and learn from them. She wasn’t born knowing everything she knows. Maybe you should ask her to tell you stories on how she learned the hard way when she was younger. You’d probably feel better about yourself. My dad has told me plenty.”

“That’s an idea. I wonder if she’d tell me.”

“Can’t hurt to ask. Sam will be here soon. I’m going to go warm up our dinner. I’m glad you’re okay. Are you banned from Glee for the rest of the year?”

“No, just this week. But next week, I have to come home right afterwards and do all of my schoolwork before Mom gets home from work. She got the test results back from Columbus and I’m behind in a bunch of stuff. I have to start seeing a tutor so I can do better on the SATs in the fall or I won’t get into college. I think I have to go to summer school or summer tutoring or something for math.”

“Well, better to figure that out now than doing poorly next fall when nothing could be changed about it.”

“Yeah, but I really don’t like school. I’m not even sure that I want to go to college.”

“I get that. But better over-prepared than underprepared.”

“Yeah. That’s what Mom said.”

Kurt laughed, and then headed down to the kitchen, pulling Finn’s door closed behind him as he left.
As Kurt got to the bottom of the stairs, Sam was about one step from the bottom step. He closed the gap and wrapped his arms around Kurt and picked him up and spun him in a circle and put him down on the floor next to him.

“I missed you.” Sam kissed him.

Kurt leaned his head to the side and nuzzled into Sam’s neck. “I missed you too.”

They stood in place holding each other for a few minutes. Sam eventually took a small step back and Kurt put his head back up.

“Are you ready to eat? I was on my way down to warm our dinner up.”

“I’ll even eat it cold.”

“I think it will taste better warm.”

“I guess that depends on what it is. Warm ice cream is gross.” He tickled Kurt and scooted off to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. “Meatloaf, mashed potatoes, and green beans. Warm it is. He took the plastic wrap off and stuck the plate in the microwave.

“Not a cold meatloaf fan?”

“Ah, cold meatloaf is delicious. Cold mashed potatoes are disgusting.”

“I see. You’ve put some effort into this field of study.” He laughed.

“I have.” He wrapped his arms back around Kurt. “C’mere you. I’m just going to hold you and keep you as my hostage. Dalton can’t have you back. I miss you too much when you’re gone.”

“I was gone for months before you came out with the pizzas.”

“I know, and my life was duller for it, by far.”

“Sweet talker.”

Sam kissed him. “You just have a spark that energizes the space around you. And Dalton has dampening fields. Damn Borg.”

Kurt snorted.

“Now, that’s better. Laughing. See, you’re already better.”

Kurt kissed him. “You’re absolutely right. I’m much better now that you’re here.”

“Now, wait. That’s not what I said.”

“Close enough.”

Before he could argue, Kurt kissed him and licked his way into Sam’s mouth deepening the kiss. Before they got too caught in making out in the kitchen, the microwave dinged and Sam let him go to pull his plate out. He put Kurt’s in next. As soon as he pushed the start button, Kurt spun him
around and resumed the kissing, dialing it back to PG-13 in case someone walked in on them. Once the microwave dinged again, Kurt grabbed his plate and a fork and walked into the dining room and sat down. Sam sat right next to him. They ate quickly, loaded the dishwasher, and turned it on. Kurt made sure nothing was out of place and grabbed Sam’s hand and they went upstairs.

“Where’s your backpack?”

“Already upstairs. Glee was cancelled, so I was home for a little bit before I went to work.”

“Why was it cancelled when you need to be working on a set list for Nationals?”

“I’m guessing we’re just winging it like we did at Regionals.”

Kurt stepped inside the bedroom door letting Sam walk through and closed and locked the door behind them.

“Mr. Schue is blowing it then. No one shows up to Nationals without a proper set list and a reasonable amount of practice. Since there’s nothing preventing songs that have been used in competition during the season, you’re going to be competing against groups that could have been practicing the songs they’re going to sing since last September.”

“I know, but I can’t make him show up and hold rehearsals. I think he’s not dealing well with Finn and Rachel’s absences. We did well at Sectionals without either of them on lead. It’s not like it’s impossible. Tina has a strong, sweet voice. Quinn’s voice is lovely, and all it would take is a headset mic so she could be heard without straining her voice. Santana has some serious belting ability. And Mercedes – that girl has some pipes on her – and the riffs and runs. She could be lead and we could win. Maybe with her and Puck or her and Artie.”

“There are a lot of good combinations and with the possibility of face mics, they can be adjusted to allow for a better mix between singers.”

Instead of making it farther into the room while they had been talking, Sam had slowly pushed Kurt against the door.

“It’s easier to just to let it be. My future doesn’t depend on how well we do. So, I’m not going to stress myself out about it. We get to go to New York which will be cool, but I’m still working on a way to hide you in my suitcase safely.”

“Is that so?”

“It is. I want to go to Central Park with you and see some of the things you want to see. You said it’s this fantasy of yours to live there. So, I’d like to see what makes this place fantasy worthy.”

“Sweet talker.”

“I love you. I want to understand what makes you find it so amazing.”

“I love you too.” Kurt kissed him gently. “That’s really sweet. I really appreciate that – more than I can even explain. Let’s take a shower and I’ll pull up my saved bootleg recordings of Wicked.”

“Alright. Sounds fun.”

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Good news!
Good news!
Who can say if I’ve been changed for the better but
Because I knew you
No one mourns the wicked.
Because I knew you, I have been changed
No one mourns the wicked.
Wicked.
Wicked!

“So, in my fantasy version of that, I get to play Elphaba somehow. Fiyero is a bisexual guy. And Galinda can still be played by a woman.” Kurt powered his laptop down and put leaned it against the wall next to the bed. He turned back over to lie facing Sam.

“I see.”

“I know it’s not going to happen, but that’s what fantasies are. Things we like to imagine could happen, but don’t.”

“I only have one problem with you being an performer.”

“What’s that?”

“I don’t want you kissing other people.” He scooted forward a bit and kissed Kurt. “I’m going to have to see someone to learn better self-control.”

Kurt laughed.

“This is not a laughing matter,” Sam said very seriously. “It will take serious willpower to not deck someone who kisses you.”

“It won’t mean anything.”

“That’s the whole thing. Your kisses mean everything to me and …”

Kurt interrupted his speech with more kisses. “We have time to work on your self-control later.”

“Later’s good,” he let Kurt deepen the kiss.

After lunch, Sam was sitting on the end of the bed watching Kurt, who had just finished reciting the monologue he had been working on.

“That was really good. You didn’t miss any of the words.”

“So will you audition with me?”

“I don’t want to have to learn a bunch of lines and stuff.”

Kurt stepped toward the bed and pulled Sam to standing. “So, don’t audition for a main role – just audition to be in support cast. You’ll just sing and be part of the background action.”

“I can do that.”

Kurt practically jumped in his arms. “Really?”
Sam grabbed him and held him close. “Yes, really. I’d do just about anything to spend time with you and see you this excited.”

“You’re a sweetie.”

Sam kissed him and spun him in a circle.

“Put me down.”

“Make me.”

Kurt started kissing him. Sam was distracted by the kissing and Kurt slid down so that his feet were touching the ground again. He ran his hands through Sam’s hair causing him to relax even more. Kurt dropped his weight and slipped through Sam’s arms and did a back roll once he was squatting. He stood straight back up and said. “Ha!” and laughed at him.

Sam was cackling and took off after Kurt. “Kissing trickery and ninja skills?”

Kurt dodged and slipped past him and climbed up on the bed. Sam followed him, but once he put one knee on the bed, Kurt tackled him and flipped him onto his back and pinned him down. “Gotcha!”

“You are sneaky and scrappy and a lot of fun.”

Kurt leaned down and kissed him. “Thank you.”

Sam slid his hands up under the kilt. “Maybe the kilt wasn’t a good idea.”

“I thought you liked it.” Kurt pushed up and looked at Sam.

“I like it too much.” He ran his hands along the back of Kurt’s thighs.

Kurt laughed. “I see. Shall I put a pair of baggy jeans on?”

“No way. Well, I mean you can if you want to, but don’t do it on my account.”

Kurt leaned down and kissed him. “I can take the kilt off, if you want.”

“How will that help?”

“Depends on your definition of ‘help’. Help you reach what seems to be your goal at the moment?”

“I’m trying to not be pushy, but God, you’re so sexy.”

Kurt blushed. He thinks I’m sexy. “What is it that you want to do with me in this kilt?”

“Lean down.”

Kurt bent his elbows and shifted his weight.

Sam whispered in his ear. Oh, my God. He wants to do that? “Really?”

“Oh, yeah. Definitely.”

“Okay.”
“Okay?”

“Yeah. Sounds amazing. I’ll do you afterwards if you want.”

“Duh.” He flipped Kurt over so he was on his back and Sam was the one on his hands and knees. He leaned down and kissed Kurt. “You’re sure?”

“I’m positive.”

Kurt slid up and lay in Sam’s arms with his head on Sam’s chest. Sam was still breathing hard, but he had come to his senses enough to wrap his arm around Kurt and pull him close.

*What if I did it all wrong?* “Was I okay?”

Sam kissed him on the forehead. “Definitely more than okay – amazing.”

Kurt smiled. “I love you so much.” He ran his fingers along Sam’s neck and then down his chest.

“I love you too.”

“Let’s take a little nap.”

“M’kay.” Sam grabbed Kurt’s hand interlacing their fingers and held it draped across his chest.

“So, I know the Comic Con in Columbus isn’t for like 6 months, but you’ll go with me, right?”

*You’re so adorable. I’ll go to whatever it is.* “Sure.”

“Do you even know what it is?”

“Not really, but you’re super excited about it, so I want to go with you.”

They were both leaned against the headboard holding textbooks, but neither of them was actually reading them. Sam leaned over and kissed Kurt on the cheek. “You’re awesome you know?”

“Of course.” He turned and kissed Sam on the lips. “I figure it has to do with comic books, which you love and you’ve got about a hundred of on your shelf over there.”

“There’s lot of other stuff too.”

“Okay. Do we get to dress up?”

“You’ll dress up with me?”

“Do you even know me, Sam Evans? Of course, I’ll dress up with you. I’m assuming that’s part of the fun of it, right?”

“Yeah, but I’ve never dressed up before because I don’t know how to sew and buying the costumes is really expensive. I didn’t work when I went to school in Tennessee – well only in the summers. And I saved that money to buy my truck.”

“So, now you have an awesome boyfriend who can sew and you have a job that you don’t have to save every penny from, so we can work on costumes.”
Sam leaned back over and kissed him again. “This is going to be awesome.”

Kurt laughed. “So, who are we going to dress up as?”

“Well, to be honest, we wouldn’t have to spend much at all if we just dressed like Wiccan and Hulkling the way they normally look.”

“And they are?”

“Right.” He shut his U.S. History book and put it on the bed in front of him and got up and went and sorted through his comics until he found what he was looking for. He got back in bed.

Kurt waited for Sam to show him whatever it was he wanted him to see.

Sam flipped through some pages and then handed it to Kurt.

“Wait, there are gay superheroes?”

“Uh, yeah.”

“Why did I not know this?”

“You read Vogue?”

Kurt elbowed him, but not hard. “Well, I would have read comic books if I had known there were cute, young gay superheroes in them.”

“Well, now you know.”

“Well, now I need to read all of them. Don’t tell me anything. I just need all of the comics that have their story in them.”

Sam laughed. “We can work on that. I’m not sure I have all of them, but we can go to a comic shop somewhere and maybe we can fill in the gaps in my collection.”

“Deal. Do you have the first one?”

“I think so.”

“They even kiss in the comics? I cannot believe I didn’t know about this. I totally need a t-shirt now. Which one is this one? The one that looks like me?”

“That’s Wiccan.”

“Maybe a hoodie. We could make them. We could get two plain hoodies somewhere and we can paint them ourselves. You’re a lot better artist than I am, but I’m not terrible. I’m sure we can do it.”

“Sounds like fun.”

“Okay, so let’s go get two hoodies.” Kurt clapped his book closed, hopped up, and put it on his vanity.

“Maybe we should do the artwork sketches first?” Sam had a huge grin on his face.

“Sure. Um, sketchbooks.” He opened the left-hand cabinet in the center section of the bookshelves and grabbed an art box and two sketchpads. He took them back over to the bed and sat them down
and got back on the bed and sat facing Sam with the art supplies in between them. “Should we draw them in their superhero form or just regular?”

“Superhero, definitely.”

“You do Hulkling. I’ll try to do Wiccan.” Kurt opened the comic book back up and looked through it to find a page with a good drawing of Wiccan’s outfit. “How about like this?”

“That’s good.”

They sat and worked on their sketches for a while.

“What do you think?” Kurt asked as he turned it around.

“That’s really good, but I think to put it on a hoodie, you’re going to have to be a lot less detailed and a lot bigger overall.”

“Let me see yours.”

Sam turned it around.

“Yours is perfect. Help me with mine, please? I’ve never tried drawing comic characters.”

“Yours is actually really good, like it could go in the comic itself.” Sam turned to a new page. He drew the outline form of Wiccan, much larger than Kurt had. “Try starting with this.” He handed him the sketchpad.

Kurt went back to work on his drawing. Sam picked his textbook back up and tried to finish his reading. A half-hour later, Kurt was getting quite aggravated.

“What’s wrong?”

He pursed his lips to one side and huffed. “I can’t get his face right.”

“The faces are always the hardest. When we paint the hoodies, I’ll help you with that part, okay?”

“Alright.” He turned it around and let Sam see.

“That’s a lot better than the first one, as far as putting it on a hoodie. The other thing is that their faces don’t have to be perfect. We’re not going for a portrait. It’s supposed to look somewhat stylized and not quite realistic. They’re comic characters.”

“I’ll work on it more.”

Sam leaned forward onto his hands and kissed Kurt. “They’re both really good for your first attempts. You should have seen mine. They were totally lame.”

“But you were probably like 8 years old.”

“Don’t discount your skills. I practice a lot more than you do.”

“You win. I won’t be so hard on myself. I really want to read these now.” He closed the comic book and moved it closer to where he was going to sit. He grabbed the art box and sketchpads to put them back.

“Wait. What do you normally draw? Can I see?”
“Sure. It’s boring though.” Kurt pulled out a smaller sketchpad and handed it to Sam and sat down next to him this time.

Sam opened it. His eyes got wider as he turned the pages. “These are not boring. They’re amazing. Are you thinking of being a designer? I mean I know you love clothes and dressing up. I just didn’t know you actually designed stuff.”

“I think it would be really cool. I wonder if there are any beginning design courses at OSU Lima. I know I had said I wanted to take European history, but maybe I could take a design class instead.” He got up and turned his laptop on. He navigated to the course catalog. After a few minutes of reading, he practically jumped out of his seat. “They have a costume design class at OSU Lima. I’m totally switching to that instead of European History, if I can.”

“Maybe we can take four classes at OSU Lima and just take two at school. We need to find out the exact rules.”

“That’s a task for Monday.” He shut his computer back down. “I want to show you something.”

“That sounds serious.”

“Yeah, but not in a bad way.” He got up and pulled an envelope out of the back of his bottom dresser drawer. He got back in the bed and sat next to Sam and handed him the envelope.

Sam looked at him strangely. “What’s this?”

“Open it and you’ll see. My dad got me these back not too long after the drunken party at Rachel’s house – after he found Blaine sleeping in my bed. Alone, I’ll add. But he flipped out and he and I had a discussion that included me making a smart aleck remark about how I should be able to go to him with questions like any straight son could after he made a comment about not knowing what ‘went down in the tent’ in *Brokeback Mountain*.”

“I haven’t seen that movie.”

“Oh. Two guys have sex in the tent, but nothing is shown in the movie.”

“That was my guess with what you just said. So, you got upset that he didn’t know and so he got you whatever is in this envelope.”

“Yeah.”

“Allright.” Sam opened the envelope. “Oh, pamphlets. I’ve seen this one and this one, but not the other one. My dad had some similar ones to this one, though. He gave me the straight versions too. He said I should be completely informed. So, your dad didn’t know this stuff so he went and got pamphlets?”

“Yeah. He didn’t go over them with me, but he read them before he gave them to me. His talk was about self-respect and using physical intimacy to be closer to someone as an emotional connection, not just as a physical release. He told me that I matter and I shouldn’t throw myself around like I didn’t.”

“Well, he’s right. You do matter – a lot. My dad gave me a similar speech about how even though I couldn’t get a boyfriend pregnant or get pregnant myself that I shouldn’t just go sleeping around because I could ‘get away with it’ more easily than if I was straight.”

“Were your parents upset when you told them?”
“Not really upset. Surprised I guess. It’s kind of hard to explain. They weren’t disappointed in me personally, but they were sad about how other people would react and how I would inevitably be treated at some point.”

“And when you started dating Quinn?”

“My mom was actually pretty aggravated. She said I was leading Quinn on. I sat down and talked to her about what Quinn had been through and that I wasn’t pushing Quinn and it was Quinn’s idea. I think Quinn wanted to be my arm candy or me to be hers, whichever way. My mom was less upset once she realized that it was more of a social thing to do than anything else.”

“And your dad?”

Sam took a deep breath. “I think he actually wanted it to work out between me and Quinn. He liked Quinn a lot. He thought she had been through a lot and come out the other side and had matured. I think he thought my life would be a lot easier if I could learn to love a girl.”

“I can see that. And now?”

“And now, they can see the change in how being myself makes a difference. How being with you makes me happier than I have been in a long time. And I think my dad’s view of Quinn’s maturity changed when she cheated on me with Finn. She traded me out for the top dog. She wants to be queen regardless of who the king is.”

“Finn’s been grounded back to the stone ages, like my dad threatened. He got to keep his phone, but he’s only allowed to use it for calls to and from Carole and my dad.”

“Oh, wow. I didn’t even think about it. I’m not around him much in the evenings. By the time I get back from work and eat, I head straight up here to get whatever I can done before it’s time to sleep. Why did he get grounded for The Muckraker?”

“He took photos when he was with Rachel staking out the motel.”

“Ah. I did not know that.”

“Neither did I. I’m really mad about it, but Carole’s talked to him every night this past week from what he said. According to Rachel, she didn’t take the photos in The Muckraker. Those photos were taken by JBI who was following her. So, I never really thought about the fact that Finn might have been taking photos too. If Rachel hadn’t been following Quinn, JBI wouldn’t have gotten those photos of you.”

“Maybe this could be used so that Rachel could get a restraining order against him or something. I know that he’s a real nuisance to her.”

“That’s an idea. But we are way, way off topic.”

Sam looked at the envelope he was holding. “Right. So, why did you show me these?”

“Mostly because I just wanted to make sure that you knew what was in them. I know you lived in a really conservative area and I didn’t know whether your parents had ever talked to you about this stuff or could even get pamphlets like that there.”

“Oh, well, I appreciate you sharing the information. Do you want to talk about it?”

*No. Yes. No. YES. “As mortifying as it is, yes.”*
“Okay.”

“Well, um. I mentioned that I’ve been teased a lot about actually having any male genitalia and its miniscule size, if I did actually have any.”

“Yeah.”

“Pretty much anything sexual that has ever been said to me has always pointed out my girly-ness. And the jocks made comments about me wearing tight pants being a way to entice them to give it to me the way I was obviously begging for. Making comments about how they’d give me ‘what I wanted’ if I didn’t stay away from them. Everything sex-related has really bordered on rape talk. And I don’t know. It’s like I’ve never felt like it would be okay for me to enjoy it or be anything besides a not-quite-willing partner on the bottom. Like if anyone ever actually was willing to have sex with me, they’d want me face down where they could sort of pretend they were having sex with a girl or where they could just dominate me with no participation or enjoyment for me.”

“Oh, Kurt. C’mere.” Sam lifted his arm and got Kurt to scoot up next to him and he wrapped his arm around Kurt’s shoulder and wiped a few tears that were escaping. “No. No. It would never be like that with us. Never.” He put the envelope on the side shelf and wrapped his other arm around Kurt pulling him really close.

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“Okay,” Kurt said really quietly, his face partially buried in Sam neck.

“I promise. When we get to that point, it will be about both of us equally. I would never do anything to hurt you intentionally. Everything I’ve read indicates that it’s going to hurt some, but that the pain eases up. But I don’t consider myself somehow in charge of how things go. We’re equal in this. I don’t have some weird male/female thing going on in the back of my mind where I consider myself the male and you the female. That’s pretty dumb. We’re both equipped with same features.”

Kurt laughed slightly.

“That’s better.” He kissed the top of Kurt’s head. “We have the same equipment, there’s no reason we can’t both use all of our features.”

“You’re silly sometimes.” He laughed.

“But I got you to laugh, so being silly is totally worth it. Your body doesn’t belong to me to use it as I see fit. That’s just so wrong. Your body belongs to you and if you share yourself with me then that’s a gift to me. Not something for me to take advantage of.”

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“Okay. So, you’d let me…?”

“Of course. I really hate this town. Not that I didn’t already, but even more than I did before. You’re not really iffy on anything else. I mean you’re really not afraid about stuff. I’m doing a terrible job at explaining myself.”

“I get it, I think. I’m not usually terribly clingy and afraid like I feel when I think about this particular subject. You’ve never seen this side of me. I was just really overwhelmed this afternoon when you wanted to do that to me. I was shocked actually. I’ve been conditioned to believe I would always be the one on the receiving end.”

“Well, I quite enjoyed myself and I’m hoping for the potential of repeating that at some point.”

“Well, I quite enjoyed it as well, obviously. And I’m game if you are.”
Sam scooted down and Kurt moved to stay in position, but Sam let go of him and lay on his side facing Kurt looking him in the eye. “We are equals in everything. I love you and you love me and we are equal. No more need to feel like maybe I run the show or you have to do what I want or I’ll walk away. It’s not like that – not at all. I’m glad you told me all of this now, so we could get it resolved ahead of time.”

Kurt leaned forward and started kissing Sam. He wrapped his free hand around the side of Sam’s neck and licked Sam’s lip and Sam followed his lead and deepened the kiss. They eventually pulled back to catch their breath.

“Sam Evans, you are a most awesome boyfriend. Thanks for helping me through my fear and for being my equal partner.”

“I think that probably just makes me decent boyfriend. I think it takes a lot more than plain old decency to make me an awesome boyfriend.”

Kurt kissed him again. “I get to decide whether you’re an awesome boyfriend or not. And I say that you are.”

“You’re right – you’re the only one who can decide whether I’m an awesome boyfriend since I don’t have any other boyfriends.” He tickled Kurt.

“You better not. That would definitely move you to the ‘not awesome’ boyfriend category, more like the ‘not my boyfriend anymore’ category.”

“Not letting that happen, if I can prevent it.”

“Prevent yourself from getting another boyfriend?”

“Now, you’re just trying to get me to tickle you.” He tickled him again.

“Who me?” Kurt laughed.

“Yes, you.” He sat up and straddled Kurt’s thighs and started tickling Kurt more.

Kurt was laughing hysterically, but managed to catch Sam’s wrist and knock him off balance just enough to get the upper hand and flip them over. He started tickling Sam instead.

There was a knock on the door.

“Come in,” Kurt called.

“What is going on in here,” Carole said as she opened the door.

“Oh, a tickle match. I’m winning right now.” He moved off of Sam’s legs and sat criss-cross on the bed.

Sam sat up. “I think it’s a tie at this point, but I suppose that’s a matter of perspective.”

“I see,” she laughed. “Anyway, I’m glad the two of you are up here laughing. It’s been a long week. I could use some laughter.”

“Yeah, we definitely needed it,” Kurt said. “Was there something you wanted to ask us?”


“I do actually have something I want to talk to you about,” she said. She closed the door and walked around the bed and sat on the arm of the chair. “So, last Friday you went and confronted Hiram about Rachel’s involvement in Sam gettingouted at school.”

“I did.”

“You didn’t tell your dad or me about your actions or that Sam had been outed.”

“You’re right. I didn’t.”

“I’d like to know why.”

“I guess because I’m not used to involving a parent in my squabbles. You know I always kept everything from Dad.”

“Yes, but I thought we were moving past that.”

Kurt shrugged. “That’s not going to come easily to me. I’m not a share-with-other-people kind of person.”

“I get that, but please tell me what happened.”

“When I went to Hiram’s office, I was not aware that Finn had had any part in the photography. I assumed that since there was an article about the two of them together staking out the motel that the photos came from JBI, who routinely follows Rachel around because he has a huge crush on her. I’m going to tell Hiram that I think he should pursue a restraining order against him at this point. Anyway – Rachel had gotten information from Blaine about how he was going to ask me to be his boyfriend a week before Regionals and she spread it around the Glee Club that he and I were dating. When I stopped by the school for Glee Club last Friday, she confronted me about the jacket Sam was wearing and ask how could I do that to Blaine. I told her that I wasn’t cheating on Blaine. I wasn’t going to OUT Sam by telling her that I was dating Sam. But I did answer her accusation truthfully. I wasn’t cheating on Blaine.”

“So, she just assumed that you had said ‘yes’ and never verified that with you or Blaine?”

“Correct. Anyway, I told her she was wrong about what she was accusing me of. Back to Hiram – I didn’t know that Finn was taking photographs that night at the motel. And by her own account of events, she went back alone the night that Sam’s family left and saw Quinn and Sam together again. So, I just considered him to be an accomplice in her nosey behavior. He didn’t think. That’s generally his ‘crime’. He acts without thinking. He didn’t go back with her after he knew about me and Sam.”

“I see.”

“Whatever you’ve been talking about with him this week has helped. He said that he’s not going to be homophobic anymore and I just need to point out anything he does that is and help him understand why it’s homophobic and he’ll quit doing whatever it is.”

“That’s a good start.”

“He also apologized to me about the bedroom re-dec. He said you made him watch *Morocco* with you.”

“I did.”
“He’s not a bad person. He’s a nice guy. He just needs to find himself, independent of those two tug-of-war harpies.”

“I see.”

“Look, if she had just told Finn, ‘I think Quinn is cheating on you.’ and he had followed her himself, even if he had taken photos, none of it would have ended up in *The Muckraker*. So, I guess I didn’t place the blame on Finn for Sam being outing. It’s because JBI regularly tails Rachel that they were caught together spying on Quinn. JBI only had to look where they were looking and watch to see what they were waiting for. When he saw Quinn and Sam come out of the motel room together and Sam hug her, he just took what he saw and wrote a story about it. And he took photos of Rachel and Finn together in Finn’s truck and used those as well.”

“Alright.”

“If she had just minded her own business and stayed out of Sam’s and Quinn’s personal lives, none of this would have happened at all. So, in my opinion Sam being outing falls squarely in Rachel’s lap. She wanted Finn back, so she tried to make it happen. And in the process, she hurt Sam the most, so I went after her. It’s not the first hurtful thing she’s done this year. It’s just the worst.”

“Well, I guess I understand your point of view. It was just difficult as a parent to be confronted by another parent about my child’s actions that I knew nothing about. If you had just told me this information last Friday evening, my dealings with the Berrys would have gone more smoothly.”

“Even if I had told you what I did last Friday, my explanation would have not included me blaming Finn. I told you that I didn’t know that he had been taking photos as well. I just thought he was tagging along because Rachel is relentless and he gives in just to shut her up.”

“Rachel tried to throw Finn under the bus. That he was the one who took pictures. That he was the one who wanted to know if she was cheating. How Quinn was untrustworthy. Blah, blah, blah. I’m tired of them both to be honest. Quinn’s mad at Finn. Maybe she’ll break up with him.”

“Finn’s actions in the fall were very homophobic. He was trying to keep me and Sam apart. But he was adamant about how badly Sam would be treated if he dated me. That part was completely true. It was why I backed off. I didn’t want Sam caught in the crossfire. I didn’t know he was gay, but just being a close friend of mine was enough to get him hassled by the jocks. I really don’t think Finn intended to out Sam at all. I know you’ve grounded him for the past week, which I think has actually helped a lot. But I don’t think he should take the blame for outing Sam. That falls on Rachel.”

Sam finally spoke up. “I agree with Kurt. I know that Finn wasn’t trying to out me. He and Quinn kept quiet about it after I told them.”

“I’ll keep all of this in mind when determining the length of his grounding. I understand that you didn’t feel the need to involve us. I can’t make you confide in us and I know it won’t come easy to you, but please consider letting us in a little. We love you and you should be able to rely on your family for support.”

Kurt nodded. “I don’t know how to have a brother either. Where do the lines get drawn? Who do I protect? Who do I confide in? If I had come to you and shown you the article, it would have been like tattling, in a way. So, I went straight to the source – Rachel and Hiram. I didn’t rat Finn out. I didn’t tattle on Rachel to you. This is all very hard to figure out.”

Carole looked like she was pondering how to answer Kurt.
Kurt spoke again. “I’m sorry that you were in an uncomfortable position with Hiram. I should have realized that Rachel would try to pass the blame somewhere. She sat there in his office and said that she was a better choice for Finn because Quinn was just using him. Well, yeah, Quinn is just using him, but the way she acts makes me wonder if she cares about Finn as a human being either. Even if she does, she needs help.”

“Do you know why Rachel hasn’t been staying for Glee?” Sam asked.

“She was grounded as well. Hiram is taking her to school and picking her up. No extra-curricular activities, period.”

“For how long?”

“I’m not sure, why?”

“Without her, we don’t have enough people to compete at Nationals. We need to find a replacement, if she’s not coming back.”

“I see.”

The three of them sat there in silence for a few minutes. Carole focused back on the present and stood up. “Dinner will be done soon – about 15 minutes. I put a casserole in the oven.”

“We’ll come down on time.”

She stopped before she got to the doorway. “I know I seem aggravated, but not at the two of you personally. I’m just annoyed that Finn’s caught up in the middle of those two girls still. I mean wasn’t Quinn getting pregnant enough for him to see that he should just steer clear?”

“They’re relentless, Carole. A hormonal teen boy only has so much resistance when two pretty girls find him attractive enough to fight over him. And I know he’s not innocent in this and cheating is wrong. I am in no way justifying the cheating. But seriously the whole situation is insane. Rachel lured him into cheating with her when he was with Quinn and thought the baby was his. And then later, he took Rachel out on a date to lure her back to Glee Club, while he still thought the baby was his. And then Rachel used Puck, Finn, and Jesse that same year. She made Finn think she had sex with Jesse. Then Santana got her claws in him. Then back to Rachel. Then when Rachel found out about Santana, she cheated on Finn with Puck to get even with Finn, even though she and Finn weren’t together when he was with Santana. Then he cheated with Quinn. Then Rachel drags him back into the tug-of-war. Now Quinn’s upset with him. Not a one of those three girls wants to be with him for who he is. It’s just so mean. I hope he finds someone nice soon. Like next year. I think he should join a monastery until the fall.”

Carole laughed. “Now, there’s an idea. I should find an all-boys summer camp.”

“Summer school and a part-time job. That will keep him busy. I’ve never figured out how he paid Ms. Corcoran back anyway.”

“Paid who back for what?”

“Nothing.”

“Kurt…”

“He’ll hate me and we’re just starting to make progress.”
She huffed. “Kurt…”

“I can’t. Not right now. I’ll talk to him about it.”

“If he owes someone money for something, he better be paying it back. If you find out that he hasn’t… I don’t want to ruin the peace and harmony that is starting to take shape, but … Fine, you talk to him.”

“Yay me,” he said sarcastically.

“I better get downstairs,” she said.

“We’ll be down in a few minutes.”

Kurt gave Sam a quick kiss. “Go down for dinner like we’re supposed to. I have to go talk to Finn first.”

“Okay. This sounds bad.”

“It’s worse than bad.”

Kurt left the room and walked down to Finn’s room and knocked.

“Come in.”

Kurt stepped inside and shut the door.

“I have to ask you something.”

“What?”

“Did you and Puck ever pay Ms. Corcoran back for the tires?”

“I paid her some of it.”

“How much?”

“About $400 I think. That’s all I made at Sheets ‘n Things.”

“You realize that she probably paid for those tires herself.” He pulled his phone out and used the internet to do some calculations. “She’s probably making $400 monthly payments and she’ll have to pay those for the next 7 years to pay off a loan if she paid for all of the tires on credit.”

“How? What?”

“Dad owns a repair shop. Have you never looked at the price of tires? Those Range Rover tires cost like $200 a piece at retail, if you get the good ones. You and Puck did around $20,000 worth of damage to those SUVs. She told you that she’d let the two of you pay the tires off, but you only paid her like one month’s worth of payments. Your $400 paid for two tires. That leaves 102 tires left to pay for.”

“I can’t pay that much.”

“You have to. You caused the damage. It’s your responsibility.”
“$10,000?”

“Exactly.” Kurt went back to using the calculator on his phone. “If you work full time this summer, 10 hours a week all next school year, and full time next summer, you can pay off what you owe her.”

“That’s nuts.”

“You should have thought about that before you slashed the tires. You could have let the air out of the tires instead of slashing them. That would have been a nuisance, like what they did to us. TPing our room was a nuisance – a bother. What you did was the monetary equivalent of them coming in destroying our grand piano and all the band equipment. That much property damage is probably a felony. She could have had you tried as an adult and you would have gone to jail. You freely admitted that you did it. There’s no shortage of people the prosecutor could have called as witnesses.”

Finn just sat there.

“You need to make this right. It’s not fair to strap Ms. Corcoran with $20,000 in debt that you caused half of. It’s time to eat. Come on.”

They all sat down to eat. Finn was noticeably quiet and didn’t take much food. He was eating slowly and staring off into space frequently between bites.

“Finn?” Carole tried to get his attention. She repeated herself. “Finn!”

“Yeah, Mom?”

“Are you sick?”

“No, why?”

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen you take so little food and take so much time to eat it.”

“Oh. I need to tell you something that I don’t want to tell you.”

“Alright…”

“Last year, I did something really stupid.”

“I’m aware.”

“No, something besides those things.”

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “What did you do?”

“I slashed the tires on Vocal Adrenaline’s Range Rovers.”

Burt spoke up. “Those things are expensive, Finn.”

“I know. Kurt just told me. $200 each.”

He questioned Finn. “You said Ranger Rovers, as in more than one. How many?”
“Technically 13, I guess. There were 26, but I didn’t do it by myself.”

“I see. So you and your unnamed accomplice slashed the tires on 26 Range Rovers? That’s about,” he calculated the total. “$20,000 retail.”

“I know. Well, I know now. Kurt did the calculations upstairs before we came down. At the time, she just said 26 times 4 times something and I didn’t catch all of it and she never said a total, just ‘I don’t have a calculator right now.’”

“I see,” Carole said. “And why did you do this?”

“They TPed our choir room.”

Burt asked, “So, they wasted maybe $40 on toilet paper and you caused $20,000 in property damage? How did you not end up in juvie?”

“She said that we could pay her back and she wouldn’t file charges.”

“And how much have you paid her back?” Carole asked.

“$400.”

“Well, obviously that has to change.”

“I know.”

“We don’t have $10,000 to give you so that you can pay her back,” Burt said. “I borrowed that much a couple of years ago to put a new roof on our old house.”

Kurt spoke up, “From when the lawn furniture was nailed to our roof.”

“Oh.” Finn’s expression gave away the fact that he knew about the prank.

“I suppose you know who did that,” Burt stated.

“Um, yeah.”

“Oh, God. Finn, tell me you weren’t part of that.”

“I didn’t do it, but I know who did. You told me not to lie to you anymore or I’d be grounded until I graduate. So, I didn’t do it, but I didn’t stop them or turn them in.”

“I’ll be back in a minute,” Burt said and got up from the table and walked out of the room.

Carole got up and followed him.

“I’m going to be grounded forever,” Finn said.

“I’m thinking you’re going to be sentenced to working every waking moment until you pay back every penny you owe, and you’re going to wish that you had just been grounded,” Kurt said.

“Great. Such a supportive answer,” Finn smarted back.

“Hey, I haven’t helped cause $20,000 in property damage in the past year.”

Finn slid his plate away, put his arms criss-cross on the table, and put his head down on his arms.
About 15 minutes later, Burt and Carole returned to the table and sat back down. Kurt and Sam were still sitting there, but they had nearly finished eating.

Carole was the one to speak. “Aunt Eunice says that she can get you on at a camp in Zanesville for the summer. You’ll work 12-hour days and stay on her farm. On the weekends, you’ll work as one of her hired farm hands. She’ll pay you $5 an hour. You can work 10-hours Saturday and Sunday.”

“That’s like slave labor.”

“There’s always spending the next year in juvie or however long in jail.”

“Yeah, working on the farm is sounding a lot better than it did at first.” He banged his head back down on his arms.

“I thought so,” Carole said. “So, you’ll work at the camp. Of course, you have to fill out the application and get approved, so if you’ve committed any other crimes, you better say so.”

“Nope,” he said without raising his head.

“So, you’ll work at the camp all summer. You’ll work a 15-hour a week part-time job, while taking 5 classes. That way you can pay everything you owe Ms. Whoever by the time you graduate. I’m sure she was expecting to be paid long before then, but even with her current leniency, I doubt she’s just going to just forget.”

“Probably not since she’s Rachel’s mom,” Finn replied.

“What? Oh, never mind. At this point, you could tell me that you stole one of Santa reindeers and I’d believe you,” Carole said, quite exasperated by this point. “You need to get those tires paid for. I’ll get her contact info from Hiram, I suppose.”

“Sure, whatever.” He banged his head again.

“Can we be excused?” Kurt asked.

“Sure, honey. Finn will wash the dishes.”

“Well, it will be quiet around here this summer,” Kurt said.

“Finn’s going to be really mad at you, isn’t he?”

“Probably, but I didn’t tell him to cause that property damage. If anything, she should go after Mr. Schuester. He was the one that said we should do something to get back at them. Actually, I should go tell Carole that. I’ll be right back.”

“Kurt?” Carole said, when he came back into the dining room and sat down.

“I think you should go talk to Mr. Schuester about this. I think he should be held responsible for some portion of the damages. He was the one that told us that we should get back at Vocal Adrenaline for what they did.”

“He’s right. He did say that. He suggested that we steal their school’s statue or something.”
“Their mascot. That’s what made me remember. It’s this giant bronze great white shark eating a seal pup. Then he suggested something about pizzas. I don’t even remember. But he definitely instigated the revenge idea. I’m not condoning Finn and his accomplice’s choice of revenge, but it was clearly Mr. Schue’s idea to do something to retaliate.”

“Figgins was going to expel us. Ms. Corcoran spoke up saying she didn’t want that. Mr. Schue said it was a harmless prank. He acted like it wasn’t a big deal.”

“I’m going to call the school Monday,” Carole said. “You’re still working at the camp and Aunt Eunice’s farm this summer though. Even if Mr. Schue pays an equal part of the damages, you still need to pay about $6,500 of it instead of $10,000.”

Finn started to eat. “Thanks for telling them that it wasn’t my idea.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Yeah, thanks for telling us,” Burt said. He just sat shaking his head. “Why would a teacher encourage retaliation?”

Finn shrugged his shoulders.

“I didn’t expect you to answer because there is no legitimate answer to that question.”

“I’m going to go back upstairs.”

“Sure, Kurt. I’ll be up in a little while.”

“Okay, Dad.”

“So, bud, you’re planning on working at the shop full time again this summer, right?” Burt asked while leaning against the bedroom doorframe.

“Yeah, Dad. But I’d like to work whatever hours Sam is working or close to the same so that we can still have some fun this summer.”

“Fine by me. You can set your hours.”

“How’s school, Sam? And don’t lie to me. I can’t take any more lies.”

“It sucks mostly.”

“I can see how that would be true. Anything in particular?”

“Being outed as a bisexual having a ménage-a-trois with two people who already have boyfriends isn’t something I’d recommend to anyone.”

“I imagine not.”

“The new No Bullying policy is supposed to go into effect this coming week. We’re having an assembly Monday morning, so I assume that’s going to be the topic of the assembly.”

“So, there’s some hope the bullying will die down.”

“I’m not counting on it, but we’ll see. Mostly it’s just been name-calling and general shoves towards
the lockers in the hallway, which don’t work well on me unless it’s Azimio or one of the linebackers. They’re just too big for me to keep my footing. Now, mostly they catch me off guard by coming up from behind and shoving me when they are almost beside me. Since it didn’t work well when I could see them coming, they changed their tactics. They haven’t resorted to slushies yet, so I’m guessing the slushie machine is broken.”

“At least the teachers are letting you email in your homework now, so there’s no risk of them ruining it by getting it wet,” Kurt pointed out.

“That’s true. It’s warm out, so I’ll just wear plain dark t-shirts and jeans and black combat boots for the next week and see how it goes. I’ll be sure to keep my books inside my backpack or my locker as much as possible to keep them from getting ruined.”

“I’ll spray his backpack and the boots tomorrow with waterproofing. It really does make a difference.”

“Thanks.”

“And your grades?”

“They’re coming back up. I turned in all those late assignments, and then I’ve been keeping caught up. I have at least a C in everything.”

“Good, good.”

“We both got into that dual-credit program at OSU Lima,” Kurt said.

“Well, that’s good news. I know you really wanted that to work out.”

“It will make next year better. I’m pushing for me and Sam to go to McKinley in the mornings and then to the college in the afternoons. That way if we need to hang around to work on a group project or get books from the library or something, we can just stay and not have to go back later. Plus, we can leave before McKinley before lunch and only be at school for a couple of hours a day.”

“Sounds like a good plan. I’m sorry for what you’re going through, Sam. People around here just… some of them are just plain awful.”

“Yeah. If you’re concerned that I’m going to bail on Kurt because I got outed – I’m not. I was going to come out anyway. Honestly, it probably wouldn’t have been until after the new No Bullying policy had been enforced long enough for people to not be willing to risk it. But I wouldn’t have stayed in the closet for long. I’m not the type to make someone my dirty little secret. Kurt’s awesome. I wouldn’t hurt him like that.”

“I’m glad to hear that.” He stood up. “I’ll let you get back to your homework. I know you have to keep up your end of the deal, so get to it.”

“Will do, sir. I mean Burt.” He shook his head and laughed. “And there I was doing so well.”

They all laughed.

Sam came out of the bathroom still bleary-eyed. “What are you working on so diligently this early in the morning? Come back to bed.”
“I woke up early and I thought I’d get a head start on this. I’ll get back in bed with you.” Kurt hit save and put his laptop to sleep and got back in bed. He did his best impression of the genie, “Your wish is my command.”

“Is that so? Aren’t I supposed to rub the magic lamp before I get any wishes?”

Kurt laughed. “Well, technically I suppose so.”

“You’re too far away.”

“I’m right next to you.”

“Closer.”

“The only way I can get closer is if I lie on top of you.”

“Good idea, but you’re wearing too many clothes.”

“Well, be my guest to remove the offending clothing.”

Sam sat up and tugged at Kurt’s shirt. He sat up, allowing Sam to pull it off over his head and then Kurt lay back down. Sam stripped the rest of his clothes off and dropped all of them on the floor on Kurt’s side of the bed.

“Pray tell, what did those poor defenseless clothing items do to you to deserve being dropped off a cliff?”

“They blocked me from looking at your beautiful body – definitely a crime.”

I’m so lucky. Kurt blushed.

“Can I touch you?”


“Are you sure? You look tense.”

“Only because I never thought anyone would want to look at me. It’s kind of unnerving to lay here naked while you’re still dressed.”

“You’re beautiful. You’re like just perfect, like someone should paint you or make statues of you like those marble ones in museums. You’re like a beautiful living work of art.”

He’s serious. He really likes the way I look. Kurt did his best to relax.

Sam started undressing. “And as much as I’d like to sketch you like this, I’ll wait 6 weeks so neither of us gets in trouble. You could be a model.” He dropped his clothing on top of Kurt’s.

I won’t argue. I won’t argue. I won’t argue. “I’ve never considered it before. You could definitely model. You’re gorgeous. You’d be great for print ads.”

“I have thought about it before. I’d do it if I could get steady work doing it, but what I’ve read talks about it being really hit or miss for print work. They need just one person for a lot of shots and they have a very specific look in mind, whereas runway work is more steady because they need quite a few people, but the pay is mostly in the clothing you model, which is why it seems like a good fit for you because you’re beautiful and you’d enjoy getting to keep the clothes you’d model.”
“That’s true about keeping the clothing, but I get your point about the print work. You might make $500 or whatever, but you’d never know when the next time you’d get hired would be. I guess you’d have to do some other type of job as well, like stocking somewhere overnight since you’d never get a call for a job in the middle of the night.”

“It would be fun to do for like a year after I had saved up enough money to live on for a year – so, I could enjoy the drama of the whole thing without stressing out that I was going to be homeless if I didn’t get a call.”

“That’s true. If we ever save up enough to live for a whole year in New York City, we can both try our luck at modeling.”

“One. If I didn’t want to keep you all to myself to admire, you could model for art classes.”

Not a chance in hell. “Nope. Not me. Only one admirer for me. No one else gets to look.”

“Lucky me.” Sam kissed him on the cheek. He scooted back. He got up and double-checked the lock on the door and got back in the bed and straddled Kurt’s thighs. He leaned forward on his hands for balance and started with Kurt’s right hand and placed gentle kisses from his hand up to his shoulder, across his collarbone and from his left shoulder down to his left hand. He moved from there to his a torso and kissed and licked his way up Kurt’s chest, up his neck and then he kissed Kurt on the lips, just as gently and sweetly as he had been kissing him. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Sam sat back up and put his hands on Kurt’s shoulders and ran them down to Kurt’s hands with just slightly more pressure than tickling. He moved his hands over to Kurt’s chest and continued caressing him the way he had been. He stopped when he hands reached Kurt’s hips.

“Can I?”

Sam wants me. Kurt nodded. “Yes, please.”

They switched and took a short nap afterwards. Once they woke up again, they dressed and got ready for the day before they headed downstairs for breakfast.

“Do you like spicy food?” Sam asked.

“I do.”

“Alright, then I’m making you breakfast. You can help with the boiled eggs, if you want.”

Kurt pulled Sam into the laundry room to kiss while the eggs were boiling.

Between kisses, Sam managed to say, “Waiting for things to boil is a lot of fun with you.”

“Sweet talker.” So adorable.

“When you say that you’re not saying that I’m making things up are you? Like you don’t believe me?”

“No. I’m just not used to be anyone saying nice things about me, but I trust you not to lie to me. So, while it feels strange, it always feels wonderful that you actually like spending time with me.”
“Of course I do. My only regret is not just walking up to you after you guys finished singing that song about New York and just asking you out. I was such a wuss. But I can’t undo that now. I can just spend time with you now because I can’t go back in time, but I can tell you for sure that if I had known how awesome it would be to be with you, I would have gotten over my fear and just asked you out.”

My heart is melting. “Thank you.”

“Kurt?” Carole called out.

“Um, yeah. In here.” Kurt opened the laundry room door and stepped out with Sam on his heels.

She laughed. “Are the two of you making out in my laundry room?”

“Yes. Definitely yes,” Kurt answered. “Seemed like a good way to spend the time while waiting for those eggs to boil.”

She laughed even harder. “I see.”

Sam walked over to the stove and by the time he got to there, the timer went off. He stopped the timer from beeping, turned the burner off, and took the pot to the sink to drain the water out and cool the eggs down. “If you like spicy food, you can try what I’m making.”

“Sounds intriguing.” She sat down at the island and watched them.

Kurt diced part of a red onion that Sam placed in front of him, and then moved onto chopping up an avocado and the small tomato. Sam looked around.

“What are you looking for?” she asked.

“ Garlic.”

She got up and got it for him.

“Thanks.”

She nodded and sat back down.

Sam assembled whatever it was while Kurt started peeling the eggs. Sam had him place the peeled eggs into the food processor. Sam helped him finish up the rest. He pulsed the food processor and then dumped the chopped up eggs into a bowl. He put the avocado pieces and the garlic in the food processor next.

He scraped the contents into a second bowl and added lemon juice and stirred, and then he added the rest of the stuff that he and Kurt had chopped up and stirred it together. He stirred the mixture into the eggs and put the bowl on the island. He found a loaf of bread.

“Regular or toasted?” he asked Carole.

“I’ll toast it.” She took the loaf of bread and toasted two slices. She grabbed three plates and sat them on the island. She put her toast on her plate when it popped up.

Kurt took out a slice for himself and toasted it next. Sam rinsed and dried some lettuce he found in the fridge. He also pulled out a bottle of Tabasco sauce. He sat down and put the egg salad into the leaf lettuce and dripped hot sauce on it, rolled it up and took a bite.
“Try it,” he encouraged Kurt.

Kurt followed his example and took a bite of his own. “That’s good.”

Carole spread some of the egg salad on, put some lettuce on her toast, and dripped a little hot sauce on and closed the sandwich up and took a bite.

“Interesting. I can’t say that I would take that much time to make this for myself in the morning, but it would make a great addition to a picnic lunch or dinner instead of traditional egg salad.”

Kurt made a half-sandwich with his piece of toast. “I like it both ways. I think on the bread, the addition of some cheese would be nice to finish it off.”

“Cheese would be good too,” Carole said.

Sam made himself several more lettuce rolls and ate them. “Mmm. I haven’t had this in sooo long.”

After they finished eating, Kurt and Sam cleaned the kitchen up and went back upstairs.

“Any homework left to turn in?”

“Nope. That was the last assignment.”

“Good. Come snuggle me.”

“Weren’t you working on something when I got up this morning?”

“Yeah, but it’s not due until the end of the week. I was just getting a head start on it because I woke up and couldn’t fall back asleep.”

Sam got up on the bed with Kurt and lay down on his chest the way Kurt wanted him to. Kurt wrapped his arm around him.

“It’s going to be okay. That assembly is tomorrow. No one has said what it’s about, but I’m certain that it’s the anti-bullying stuff.”

“My first response is to protect the people I care about. And I don’t want to see you hurt. I don’t want you to hear the things I’ve heard. I don’t want them to do to you what they’ve done to me. I want to prevent all of that and I can’t. And it makes me feel torn. I feel like if I were there, they’d just be meaner. But at least you wouldn’t be alone.”

“Let’s just try to give the anti-bullying plan a chance. I know you’re concerned on my behalf, but I’m asking you to focus on your schoolwork each day so you’ll be prepared for your exams and I’ll do the same. We can talk on the phone every night. Since Finn lost all of his electronics, maybe I could use his laptop for an hour each night and we could Skype.”

“That’s a good idea.”

Later that night after they had showered and put their pajamas on, they finally sat down and sang their duet.

Oooh ooooh ooooh ooooh ooooh ooooh
I’m lucky I’m in love with best friend.
Lucky to have been where I have been.
Lucky to be coming home again.
Lucky we’re in love in every way.
Lucky to have stayed where we have stayed.
Lucky to be coming home some day.

Oooh oooh oooh oooh oooh oooh

Sam finished strumming the final chords. “Now the song was sung truthfully.”

Kurt leaned forward from his criss-cross position onto his hands and kissed Sam gently and plopped back down into his previous position.

“You are my best friend. And I love you. And I’m glad I stayed here with you. I have a song I want to sing for you.”

“Okay.” Kurt had a big smile on his face in anticipation.

Sam started to play and sing. Parts of the song stuck out as Kurt listened.

I’ve never seen it, but I found this love.
I’m gonna feed it.
You better believe I’m gonna treat it
Better than anything I’ve ever had.
‘Cause you’re so damn beautiful.

Everything is like a white out ‘cause we shook-a-shook-a shine down.
Even when the, when the light’s out but I can see you glow.
Got my head up in the rafters, got my happy ever after.
Never felt this way before, ain’t felt this way before.

I swear you hit me like a vision.
I, I, I wasn’t expecting.
But who am I to tell fate.
Where it’s supposed to go.

Oh, we could be the stars, falling from the sky.
Shining how we want, brighter than the sun.

Sam finished singing the song, all the while Kurt continue to smile. As soon as Sam finished, Kurt leaned up on his hands again and kissed him.

“Thank you. I loved it.”

Kurt and Sam were lying in bed half-asleep when they heard a quiet knock on their door. Kurt opened the door to find Carole standing there. He stepped into the hallway, quietly closing the door behind him.

“We’re all going to McKinley to the assembly. It’s scheduled to start 10 minutes after school starts.
It’s slated to last all morning.”

“Alright. Why didn’t you tell me last night?”

“I wanted you to sleep instead of fret.”

He nodded and went back inside.

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Kurt crawled back in bed with Sam. “Good morning, sleepyhead.”

“It is with you still in the bed.” He pulled Kurt closer and kissed him.

“Carole told me that I’m going to the assembly at McKinley.”

“We still have time for snuggles and kisses.” He started kissing Kurt again.

I’m a lucky guy. A lot of guys would have probably denied the whole thing and not been willing to come out yet. “I love you.”

“I love you too. It’s going to be okay. I don’t know how, but it is. We’re together. We can do this. I know that you’re still scared that I’ll bail because this is too hard. But being without you would be a lot harder.”

Sam is perfect. Well, no one is perfect, but he’s as close as possible. “You say the sweetest things.”

“I mean it.”

“I know. That’s what makes you so amazing. You’re really brave, even if you don’t feel like it.”

“Like that poster in your bathroom. It says – ‘Fear fills your legs with lead, stuffs your mouth with cotton, makes your heart pound out of your chest, and never lets your lungs fill. Courage is lacing up your shoes and walking out the door anyways.’”

“I hung that on the bathroom wall to remind myself and it’s a good reminder for you too. Being brave doesn’t mean you overcame your fear, it means that you still try to do what’s right or needs to be done even though you’re still afraid. It’s okay to be afraid.”

“You hid your fear well.”

“Letting people see that I was afraid only encouraged them to terrorize me more. At least minor bullies back off when they get no reaction. No reaction equals no fun for them.”

“I can see that. I’ve been ignoring people to the best of my ability, but it would have been a lot easier to ignore them if what they were saying was true. I wouldn’t be ashamed if I were bisexual, but being accused of cheating – I’m not a cheater. Anyway, we need to get ready, don’t we?”

“Not quite yet. I have an experiment first.”

“An experiment?”

“Yep. I think that lots of kisses will make you feel less afraid.”

“I see. Is there some kind of consent form to sign to participate in this experiment?”
“Nope. I only have one opening and your name is already written on the form.”

“Hmm. I see.” Sam slid forward and started kissing Kurt. After about 10 minutes of kissing, he said, “I see your point. I think it’s working.”

Kurt laughed. “We have to get up now.”

“Boo.”

God, he’s cute. “Up, you go.” Kurt tried to slide back, but didn’t manage to escape.

“Oh, no you don’t.” Sam grabbed him around the waist with one arm.

Kurt laughed. “We really have to get up. Come on.” This time he managed to roll over and get up off the bed. He walked around to the other side to pick out an outfit and seconds later, he was enveloped in a hug from behind and his neck was being covered in tiny kisses.

“Holding you is even better than just the kisses. We can go to school like this. I’ll just wrap my arms around you and to hell with what they think.”

“Well, now that’s an interesting option, but we still have to wear clothes, so get dressed.”

Sam started undressing Kurt. “I like undressing better.”

Stop being so adorable. Scratch that. Save the adorable for later. “Me too, but I’m pretty sure that you weren’t interested in me doing a live impersonation of the David statue.”

“Nope, not at all. How about this shirt?” Sam pulled one off the rack.

“If you like that one, I’ll wear it.” He put it on and buttoned it up. He grabbed a pair of pants that went with it and put them on as well. He grabbed his Docs and headed out to the room to grab socks.

Sam came out of the closet wearing a t-shirt, jeans, and he was carrying the black combat boots. He grabbed socks and put the boots on and stood up. “Done.”

Sam brushed his teeth and moved out into alcove.

“We both need haircuts,” Kurt said as he tousled Sam’s hair as he walked past on his way into the bathroom to fix his hair and brush his teeth.

“Next weekend.” He stepped right in front of Kurt when he came out of the bathroom and wrapped his arms around him. “Let’s go eat and get to school. You’re riding there with me, right?”

“Do you want me to?”

“I told you that I’m not hiding now. I plan to hold your hand on the way in, if you’ll let me. Your parents are going to be right near us. I doubt anyone is dumb enough to say or start anything with your dad standing there.”

“True.” Kurt closed the space between them. “You’re amazing. I love you.” He kissed Sam quickly and moved toward the door. “Let’s go.”

Sam blinked and refocused. He grabbed his backpack and followed Kurt downstairs. Carole had made breakfast for everyone and the five of them ate together. They headed off to the school in three vehicles.
Chapter 11

Mrs. Huntington was waiting for them outside the school. Before they made it up to the door to greet her, Kurt stopped by the newly installed dumpster to have a look at it. It’s seemed secure and like no one would be taking any dives into it. Sam moved closer and took his hand and they walked up to the building. Burt and Carole were already speaking with her when they walked up the steps.

“So, we’re going to head into the gymnasium ahead of time and sit in the top row of bleachers, hopefully away from most of the students. Mr. and Mrs. Karofsky are already inside. We’ll sit at the other end of the bleachers from them. The parents of the entire football team, hockey team, baseball team, basketball team, Glee Club, and AV Club have been summoned as well. The school cannot force them to attend, but the letter was quite firm about them attending. They have been seated along the top rows of the other side of the gymnasium. They met outside the gym doors about 10 minutes ago. Coach Beiste showed them to their seats.”

Kurt was surprised. “This better be good or it’s going to make things worse.”

“Let’s get inside,” Mrs. Huntington said, as she led the way to where they were going to sit.

They sat down and waited for the students to arrive for the assembly to begin. Once the students were all seated, Kurt looked at the adults sitting on the platform – Miss Pillsbury, Coach Sue, Coach Beiste and a couple of teachers. The first thing that Kurt noticed was that Principal Figgins was nowhere to be seen.

Miss Pillsbury approached the microphone. The students didn’t quiet down. She stood there. Coach Beiste blew her whistle. That got people’s attention and everyone quieted down.

“Today’s assembly is about our school and the changes that will be taking place over the course of the next few weeks and next school year. First and foremost, as many of you may have noticed, Principal Figgins is no longer a member of this school’s staff. Coach Beiste has replaced him as our new school principal. You may call her Coach Beiste or Principal Beiste from now on. She will be speaking a little later this morning. Our first presenter this morning, will be Coach Sylvester who will be discussing academic integrity and what that means for the end of this school year and in the future.” Miss Pillsbury sat down.

Coach Sue stood at the mic. “Thank you, Miss Pillsbury.” A PowerPoint presentation loaded on the screen behind the stage and the lights in the gym were dimmed. “Over the course of the last several years, many of our students have found using the internet to be helpful with completing their homework. And while using the internet to learn new information is admirable, copying and pasting information directly from websites into school assignments does not count as doing the assignment. This form of cheating is rather new and was not expected by many of our staff and they only realized what was going on when several students plagiarized the same answers from the same websites. This type of academic fraud will no longer be accepted at McKinley High School. Starting in the fall, the school will be participating in BlackBoard, which is an online program. Students will submit their papers into the appropriate dropbox for their course. Their assignments will be run through a program that detects plagiarism from the internet and a very comprehensive list of print books and other printed material. We are aware that not all students in this district have access to personal computers at home, but that issue has been dealt with and will be discussed a bit later in this
A few weeks ago, I ran a journalistic experiment of sorts. I restarted a school newspaper. A few interested students wrote articles and submitted them to a student editor, who approved them and the newspaper was printed. Unfortunately, it turned out that the newspaper had zero journalistic integrity and was nothing more than a gossip rag. The students who turned in articles did not fact-check their stories and the students in charge of editing the information did not fact-check the information either.

What I learned from this is that the students at this school do not know how to properly research topics. They do not know how to separate out facts from gossip. They do not know how to tell the difference between satire and truth. I’m not even sure that they can distinguish between fact and fiction. What the students at this school need to know is that the information printed in *The Muckraker* was pure gossip. And gossip means, maybe it has some truth to it, but not much. Something else that needs to be understood from this experience is that photos tell stories, but the stories they tell can be made up and those stories can be false just as easily as they can be true.

Assuming that someone can determine the true story behind a single photo is just ludicrous. I know that all of you have seen absolutely crazy pictures that you know are faked, but the instant you see people you know in a photo, somehow you’re convinced that you have the intelligence to know exactly what happened in the photo.” She flashed through several images on the screen. “This is when I met Abraham Lincoln. That’s me with Ronald Reagan in 1981. This is me at Bill Clinton’s inauguration. It’s me being blessed by the Pope in Rome. Oh, and this one is my favorite. It’s me being knighted by Queen Elizabeth.”

Some of the students were laughing.

“Good. I see that some of you have figured out that I got one of our AV kids to Photoshop some images of me. And they did a bang up job. None of those photos are real. You, as young adults, must learn to research and learn to tell when you’re being manipulated by the media or just flat out being told lies that look like truth. One day soon, all of you in this room will be adults who need to have these skills. No one likes to be played. But you all are letting it happen to you all the time.

“I expect anyone who has been treating a fellow student differently because of the articles in *The Muckraker* to examine your ability to know the difference between the truth and gossip. Did you approach the person who was the topic of an article and ask the person if it was true? Did you just assume that it was true because it was printed on a piece of paper? I think a lot of you in this room owe other people in this room apologies.

“Gossip tears a school apart. Blind hatred towards people because someone is somehow different than you tears communities apart. Cliques are tearing our school apart. Being a football player does not make you a better person than being a member of the Chess Club. Being a hockey player does not make you a better person than being a member of the Glee Club. For all the hatred that these supposedly ‘lower on the food chain’ groups receive, I bet not a single one of you football players would enjoy spending the rest of your lives with no music, no movies, and no televised sporting events.

“Everyone enjoys entertainment, even football players. If our football players bully every person that makes music and sings or who runs AV equipment and programs computers – and the rest of the football players across the country do the same, who will sing at the halftime shows? Whose CDs will you buy or whose songs will you download or watch on YouTube? Think about that. Everyone one of your big music idols probably started out as a Glee Club member somewhere. You all seem to love Beyoncé. What if the football team at her school had slushied her enough times that she gave up singing? Think about these things. With no geeks, there are no people to create movies with all of
those special effects you love so much.

“Schools are a mandatory part of childhood. Adults have decided that a civilized society is comprised of well-educated members. This school is changing course and it’s time to buckle up for the ride. New policies will be implemented, beginning as soon as this assembly ends. Coach Beiste will be discussing those changes.”

Coach Beiste moved to the podium. “Most of you know me as the coach of the football team. When I arrived here at the beginning of this school year, I found out that members of my team had serious attitude problems. I cut every member and held tryouts. I filled the positions with the best players available to me. I worked on their elitist attitudes, but it hasn’t been enough. Members of my team continue to target other students in this school. Physical bullying is happening on a daily basis in this school and the two main groups responsible for this are the football team and the hockey team.

“Effective immediately, any member of a sports team who physically assaults another student will be put on probation with their sporting team for the upcoming school year. You will receive handouts that list the actions that will cause disciplinary action.”

Distinctive low level booing could be heard.

“ENOUGH! This school will be implementing a No Bullying policy that will be sent home to all students who attend this school. The form must be returned to the school by Wednesday of this week. Both the student and the student’s guardian MUST sign the form. If we do not receive your form on Wednesday, your parents will receive an in-home visit from a representative of the school district to obtain their signatures on the form.

“No student will be allow to participate in any extra-curricular or after-school activities without a signed form on file. And for those of you sports players who find this to be absurd, I can guarantee that if you get offered a scholarship to continue playing your sport for a college, you will be signing similar forms agreeing to the team’s ethics and behavior code, violations of which will terminate your scholarship and eligibility to play. And we all know how many people get drafted that haven’t played in college, so those of you who were booing can think about that.

“The dumpsters have been replaced. They can no longer be accessed by students. Any student needing to throw trash away will need to do so inside the school building in one of the trash bins. As you can see behind me, a wide variety of new policies are being implemented. One notable one is that the slushies and other drinks will no longer be allowed to leave the cafeteria area. And as you can also see, using a liquid as a projectile, meaning throwing it at someone, is now automatic 3-day detention. A second offense will receive an in-school suspension. If the disciplinary action is not enough to stop the behavior, the school will begin to serve only water and white milk in the cafeteria. All of the slushie machines and the other liquids will no longer be available for purchase or allowed to be brought into the school without medical documentation.

A lot of booing started.

“LISTEN UP! School funds are being wasted on cleaning products and staff hours to clean up the messes you all are creating. Wouldn’t you rather see that money go into improving the school in some way? Even if that doesn’t matter to you, it matters to the taxpayers in this school district. Every textbook that has been destroyed at the hands of one of you slushie-throwers has cost the student who was assaulted a lot of money. Those books aren’t free. And the students whose parents cannot afford their books, that falls on the district cover due to federal laws about educating every student in our district. Destroying school property is a crime. And the criminal behavior will no longer be tolerated.
“This school will become a safe zone. It will be a place where the students in this community can come and learn and not be afraid. If your parents are not in agreement with our new behavior policies, they are free to make an appointment with me and come in and discuss their issues with the policies.

“Students will move to and from classes in our hallways freely with no risk to their personal possessions or safety. And to this end, our hallway monitoring guidelines have changed. All students must have a signed pass to be in the hallways during class time. That means you’ll need a pass to go to the restroom, the nurse, the library, or to the guidance counseling office. If you are found in the hallway during class without a pass, a teacher will escort you to my office directly. Every major hallway intersection will be staffed by a teacher during classes. And during passing periods, all teachers will be standing outside their doors observing student behavior. Teachers will also be stationed outside the restrooms during passing periods. There will be no more swirlies or ruined notes or homework in the restrooms.

“It sounds like a prison,” a student shouted.

“Well, when students can’t be trusted to allow their fellow students to walk down the halls without being injured, rules have to be implemented. The students who have been on the receiving end of your bullying will welcome these new guidelines. Those of you who have been perpetrating these crimes are the ones who have brought these stricter rules upon yourselves.

“You suck!”

“Verbal bullying will not be tolerated. Students will be expected to speak to each other civilly and those who will not comply will find themselves writing essays in detention each afternoon instead of attending their afterschool activities. Schools with the level of disrespect and bullying that our school currently has have been seen to have student deaths within a few years time – fatal stabbings, beatings, bludgeonings. Is that what we want for our school? I say ‘no’. It’s time to turn the course of the school in a better direction. We will be a school with a reputation for hard work, discipline, and integrity.”

Quite a few students were clapping.

“Miss Pillsbury will speak to the academic changes that will be taking place.” Coach Beiste returned to her seat.

Miss Pillsbury began, “The school will be changing from its current 6 course a day format to a block format. If you look behind me, you can see how this will work. We will offer 8 courses per semester with a M/W/F, T/R/F alternating pattern. This will take everyone a little time to get used to, but it has worked well in the districts that have implemented it. It has the same amount of contact time per subject, or close to it, but the classes will be in longer blocks. Each class will be attended five times in a 10-day period. The 8 classes will allow some clubs, such as Jazz Band and Glee Club to become actual courses for credit like most high schools in this area. For most students, they will continue to take 6 classes per semester and they will take two study halls – so they will have a study hall each day of the week.

“Earlier, Blackboard was mentioned. During study halls, students will have access to the school’s computer system and will be able to upload their written assignments to the appropriate dropbox in the Blackboard system. All students will receive training on how to use the dropboxes and the Blackboard system at the beginning of the fall semester.

“The additional two periods may be filled with courses for those students interested in taking more courses. This will allow more students to be able to take classes such as art, music, cooking and other
courses that are not part of the required courses to graduate. The addition of a study hall each day will give struggling students time to receive tutoring during school hours and it will also allow students who participate on sports teams or who have afterschool jobs time to work on their homework each day during school. Any sports team member not performing at required levels academically will be receiving mandatory tutoring to bring their grades up to suitable levels.

“All of the information will be sent home with students for them to share with their guardians. If your guardians have any questions, contact information is on the information sheets. Returning students will start their fall registration within the next two weeks. As you’ve already seen, staff changes have already started, but there will be more staffing changes in the fall. Some of our teachers will be retiring, others will be moving on to pursue more education themselves before returning to teach. Any staffing changes besides Principal Beiste’s new position will not be made known until a couple of weeks before school starts due to contracts and scheduling issues, so please do not start asking the teachers whether they will be back in the fall. The positions have not yet been settled because we need to see course selection data as well. If twice as many students want to take Spanish as want to take French, it would not make sense to have twice as many French teachers as Spanish teachers on staff.

“In conclusion, bullying will no longer be tolerated. Our school will be a place where students come together to form a learning community. We will strive to become a school known for our hard work, discipline, and integrity. Remember that the forms need to be returned to the school by Wednesday. They will be distributed to you when you return to your classes. Everyone is dismissed with the exception of those of you who were notified in advance.”

Once the students who are allowed to leave were gone, the jocks and their parents along with the parents of the Gleeks and other bullied kids were ushered to the bottom of the bleachers by Coach Beiste. The jocks all sat in a group together, away from the parents, who all sat mixed together.

Miss Pillsbury spoke. “We specifically requested for you to be here today because your children are either among the group of known bullies or the known targets of the bullies. I’d like for the parents to stand up and introduce themselves to each other. We’ll start on this end.”

Each parent stood and stated their name and named their child.

“We brought you in today in an effort to figure out how to stop the bullying. Much of the bullying is due to the jocks believing that being ‘different’ is a justifiable reason to assault people. This is social bullying. Mr. Berry introduced himself a few minutes ago. He’s Rachel’s dad. She is not much taller than 5’ and has a very slender build. She is a member of a multitude of clubs. She was picked out freshman year, which was before I arrived, but she was already one of the ‘chosen’ ones to receive slushie facials. She is no threat to any of the students that have attacked her. No one has ever identified a reason to me why Rachel has received so much hatred, other than that she’s annoying. Bullying and assaulting someone because they are supposedly annoying is a ridiculous reason. Of all of the students in this school Kurt Hummel has been assaulted more than any other. He is here today, but actually now attends a private school in a placement paid for by this district. His life was threatened. During my two years here, he was a student here for three semesters. During that time, he was on the receiving end of dumpster tosses and was shoved into lockers resulting in five broken bones. FIVE broken bones. He still has bruising from events that took place before he left the school in November over four months ago.”

Many of the parents looked shocked.

“I’m glad to see that you look shocked about this. The bullying that is going on here is not the simple bullying of ‘your shirt is ugly’ or the ‘your momma’s fat’ jokes. This is flat-out assault and property
damage. Kurt’s placement out of district in a safe school has cost the district a lot of money. And that is not Kurt’s fault. It is the fault of parents and a society that teaches and allows one group of people to hurt another group of people for arbitrary reasons. Hurting people because they are Jewish, or black, or tall, or short, or fat, or skinny, or gay, or atheist, or Christian, or annoying, or terrible at sports – none of those are valid reasons to injure another human being.”

One of the parents raised her hand. “Why hasn’t the school contacted us about this situation?”

“That’s a good question and I’m glad you asked. There’s a ‘circle the wagon’ mentality. And for those of you who don’t know what that means, it means that the bullies are united. They cover for each other. They give each other alibis. They get a group together to say that it didn’t happen the way the victim said it did. And in all honesty, the previous head of the school despised dealing with conflict and he just let them go. When one of them would be accused, the accused would bring in a witness to agree with his side of the story, and then they were both let go and the victim was dismissed as a liar or just trying to cause trouble. Afterwards, the victim would be targeted for more bullying than before for attempting to get the bullies into trouble. So, it eventually created an environment where the victims all knew that going to the administration was a waste of time because it just made their lives more difficult in the long run and the bullies were emboldened by their successful intimidation tactics.”

“You mentioned a death threat,” she stated.

“Yes. It was specific to Kurt and not to the general school population.”

“What was done about that?” she asked.

“The student was initially expelled because it happened during a short period of time when Coach Sylvester was acting principal. But the student’s parents fought the expulsion and the school board sided with them and the student was allowed to return to the school.”

“How can that be?” she asked.

“It was a decision that I was not a part of, so I do not have an answer to that question. Kurt withdrew from the school when he learned that the person who levied the threat was returning.”

“Well that’s understandable,” the same woman said.

A lot of the other parents nodded.

She spoke again. “You said the district is paying for him to attend a different school. Why?”

“If a home district cannot provide an appropriate education, the school is required by law to pay for an out-of-district placement for the student. This is most often seen with blind or deaf students. Home districts are required to pay for those children to attend specialized schools.”

“I see,” she said. “So, in this case ‘appropriate’ meant where his life wasn’t being threatened.”

“Basically yes. But the district is not going to pay for an out-of-district placement for him next school year. He will be returning to McKinley. These changes are being implemented by outside forces as well as by choice by some people within the school itself. We were presented with the option of complying and providing a safe school for all of our students or the advocate that secured the funding for Kurt’s out-of-district placement threatened to bring a class action suit against the school district requesting out-of-district placements for all 30-40 of the habitually bullied students in this school, which the school district cannot afford.”
“Alright,” she said. “So, the majority of us who stood up and introduced our children as athletes are the parents of the students who are bullying the children of the rest of the people here?”

“That is a generally true statement. But it is not 100% accurate. Not ALL of the sports team members are bullying other students. But as I mentioned, the bullies have banded together making it pretty hard to determine which ones are. We know a few for certain because they are constant repeat offenders, meaning on a daily basis.”

“So, if I were to ask you privately after this is over if you know for certain that my son is one of these bullies, will you tell me?”

“Yes, of course.”

She nodded and sat back down.

“The jocks at this school have a huge attitude problem when it comes to the teachers as well. Many of the teachers are afraid to grade your students’ work appropriately. The school has had minimum GPA requirements for the sports teams for many years, but as the bullying has increased, the intimidation of teachers has increased as well. We have many teachers in their 50’s and some in their 60’s who love teaching, but who are part of the group that is considering retiring or taking positions in other districts at the end of this school year. When a student athlete turns in a paper that is obviously plagiarized or written by another student, the teachers are afraid to give those student athletes the zeros they deserve. Teachers have had their tires slashed, their homes vandalized, and personal items from their classrooms stolen.”

“Are you serious?” the same mother asked.

“Unfortunately, I am.”

“This is absurd. Students who assault other students and who vandalize teacher’s property? This is like reading the news from some big city with crime problems.”

Kurt stood up. “May I address the group?”

“Sure, Kurt.”

Kurt walked down to the floor level. “I just want to make sure that you see me. I am a straight A student. I’m a member of the National Honor Society. I currently tutor students at my school. I have never started any type of conflict with any of the jocks at this school. Our home has been vandalized. My father’s shop has been vandalized. I received phone calls and notes in my locker while attending school here suggesting that I commit suicide. My textbooks were destroyed by slushies. Jocks have taken my class notes and stuck them in the sinks and soaked them so that they were useless. They done the same thing to papers and assignments I had completed. I have been shoved in to lockers too many times to count. I lost track of the dumpster tosses. For those of you who don’t know what that is, it’s when two or more jocks grab you and toss you into the dumpster and leave you there. I have spent thousands of dollars replacing phones, clothing, laundering clothing, having it dry cleaned, and replacing textbooks. I’ve spent endless hours redoing assignments and doing extra credit to get the points back I lost from having my work destroyed. And yes, I’ve had five fractured bones from the physically bullying. My dad had to have our roof replaced when the football team nailed our lawn furniture to our roof as a prank. I have lived through the humiliation of having pee balloons thrown at me. All this has happened because I am openly gay. I have not done anything personal to any of the jocks who have done these things to me. Heck, I helped the football team win their only game last year as the kicker. But somehow in the end, they hated me even more because being shown up by a ‘fag’ is worse than losing. I didn’t want to change schools. All I want to do is go to school in peace. I
don’t think that’s asking too much."

He went back to his seat, but stopped before he got there and turned back.

“Miss Pillsbury didn’t mention Artie, who is in a wheelchair, being pushed down a flight of stairs or being locked in the port-a-potties out in the football stadium. He’s been slushied too.”

The same mom stood and spoke up. “Pee balloons? Calls suggesting that you kill yourself? Oh, honey, that is just beyond horrible.” She looked at the group of students. “He stayed through all that? He put up with all of that until one of you threatened to kill him?” She looked around at the parents sitting near her. “I don’t care how wrong you think being gay is. That boy has been abused at the hands of some of OUR children. This has to stop.” She turned back and addressed the jocks. “And you pick on girls? What is wrong with you boys? I don’t care if Rebecca or Rachel or whatever is the most annoying person on the face of the earth, what kind of teen boys attack a girl that probably doesn’t even weigh 100 pounds? You all are criminals. She can’t properly defend herself. What if she was your sister, how would you feel about a 6’4”, 250 pound nearly-grown man attacking your sister or your mother or your grandmother? And pushing a boy in a wheelchair down a flight of stairs? What? His life isn’t hard enough in a wheelchair?” She glared at the boys seated near her. “YOU ARE CRIMINALS.”

The jocks stared at the floor.

“That’s right. Look down. Be ashamed. You all ought to be ashamed. I’m ashamed of all of you who have done these things. It makes you real big men to push around a tiny girl? And a boy in a wheelchair? HA! It makes you despicable.” She shook her head and sat back down.

Miss Pillsbury spoke again. “If parents and schools don’t get the students to understand the value of hard work, discipline, and integrity things are going to get bad in Lima. Some of these students graduate this year. The Lima police consider bullying on school property to be a school’s problem, but when these students graduate, and they behave this way in public, the police will get involved and your adult children are going to end up in jail.”

“Well, if my son has been a part of it, he won’t be anymore,” the same mom said. “I didn’t survive growing up in inner city Chicago to move to a nice small town to have my son grow up to be a hoodlum and a criminal.”

“I appreciate your support in this.”

Coach Beiste stood up. “The sports teams will be attending mandatory diversity training at the beginning of the school year. No one will be allowed to play without attending the course. Parents can request to view what will be taught ahead of time and you can refuse to allow your student to participate, but he will not be allowed to play on the team.”

The same woman spoke up again. “Why would anyone refuse?”

“Because part of the teaching covers sexual orientation as a protected group.”

“What do you mean by protected?”

“It means that bullying someone just because of their sexual orientation will not be allowed. Currently in Ohio sexual orientation is not a protected group. That means that an employer can fire a person just for being gay. You don’t have to have done anything wrong – just being gay can get you fired. People can refuse to rent an apartment to someone just because the person is gay.”

“Being gay is a sin,” someone said.
“That is a personal belief that not all people hold. Science says that people are born with their sexual orientation as part of who they are. Science has shown that conversion therapy does not work. Many gay people have lived their whole lives in the closet, opted to marry and raise families, but when interviewed they are still gay, and a lot of the times miserable. How many of you would like to be forcibly required to live with a same-sex partner in order to be considered acceptable by society? Many societies throughout history accepted homosexual and bisexual individuals and did not consider their sexual orientations to be abnormal or immoral. What is a sin? Sin is what a group of people decide is wrong, but that list isn’t constant across all religions or even within a particular religion. You’ll find Jewish people that eat pork. You’ll find Christians who drink and dance and other Christians who say that drinking and dancing is a sin. Some religions teach that eating meat is wrong. The diversity training will not require anyone to agree with or disagree with anyone else’s beliefs. It will just teach the team that accepting people as they are is what is expected. Calling people derogatory names like ‘spick’ or ‘fag’ or ‘nigger’ or ‘dyke’ or ‘slut’ any other number of words will not be allowed. And as I said, parents are more than welcome to come in and pick up a copy of what will be taught ahead of time.”

A man spoke up. “So, you’re not going to teach my kid that being gay is okay. You’re just going to teach him that he can’t pick on gay kids just because they’re gay?”

“Exactly. I’m not going to teach your kids that being Jewish is right or wrong or that being atheist is right or wrong. I’m not going to teach them that being sexually active is right or wrong. I’m going to teach them that being mean to people because they are different is wrong. The point is respect. People can respect each other without having to agree with each other.”

“I can live with that,” he responded.

“We will be doing fundraising before the end of the school year to update the locker rooms with more privacy features. One thing that the jocks have complained about is the potential for gay students to watch them shower. Not that we have any evidence of that happening, given that we currently have had only one out gay student and he did not shower with the team when he was on the team last year. But to allay any fears from both sides, we will be installing additional privacy barriers in the shower area of the locker rooms. Anyone who wants to see the design can come look before they leave. We would ask that when we send home the fundraising sheets that you help your students raise the money for this. It is the jocks that have complained loudly about the lack of privacy. They can be the ones to help raise the funds for these improvements. I’ll be having them all stay after school one day next week.”

“You keep referring to all of the jocks as male. Does the school not have a problem with female bullying?” the same question-asking woman asked.

Coach Beiste answered. “Not to the extent that would warrant any school-wide changes. None of the female athletes have complained about the potential for sharing showers with lesbian teammates or students. I don’t know that we actually have any female students who have publicly declared that they are lesbians, but the female population of the school doesn’t seem concerned about their potential existence. Statistics say that in a school this size, there are 40-60 LGBTQ students. With only one gay student publicly sharing his orientation that leaves 39-59 students who are most likely afraid to identify themselves as LGBTQ. Fear of being rejected by their families or fear of being treated the way that Kurt has.”

Miss Pillsbury spoke again. “I appreciate the fact that so many of you took the time to come this morning. I’d be glad to talk to any of you individually. You are all free to leave. You can also stay and talk to each other, if you’d like. The students need to return to class.”
Burt and Carole were still talking to some of the parents. Kurt waved as he and Sam walked toward the exit, and Burt nodded.

“Well, that was interesting,” Kurt said, as he and Sam walked out of the gymnasium hand in hand through the empty hallway after everyone else had gone back to class.

“Yeah. I guess we’ll see what affect it has by the end of the week. From how serious everyone sounded, I think if anyone actually hassles me, they’ll be gone. I have no hope that I’ll be accepted, but like you said, I’d be happy if they just left me and you alone. I don’t need their approval, but I’d like them to stop harassing me – and you – when you come back. I already told you that I don’t think I’ll play any sports next year.”

Kurt changed the subject. “I’m excited to register for our classes this afternoon.”

Coach Sylvester came around the corner from the opposite direction and stopped the two of them before they made it out of the building. “Please follow me to my office.”

They did as she requested. The both took a seat facing her desk. She shut the door behind them and sat down at her desk.

“Why did you want to see us Coach?” Kurt asked rather bruskly.

“I wanted to tell both of you that I’m sorry. I should not have allowed The Muckraker article to be printed that outed you, Sam. I did not think through the potential outcome of allowing that story to be published. I allowed my anger at the three Cheerio girls who ruined my 6-year Nationals streak to fill me with even more rage toward Glee Club than I had before. I meant what I said up there. If all of the musicians got bullied for making music, the world would be such a boring place to live. Kurt, I also meant what I said last year about trying to keep you safe here at McKinley, and then I was stupid to allow that article that outed Sam or potentially outed him. Even if he was 100% straight, allowing an article like that to be published was just asking for someone to hurt him. And for that I’m sorry. I will be keeping an eye on you, Sam. And I want you to come directly to me or go to Coach Beiste if anyone hassles you about being gay or bi or whatever.”

“Thank you, Coach Sue,” Sam said.

“I know you don’t trust me now, Kurt. What I did endangered the person you care about. But I would still like you to return to the Cheerios.”

“I’ll consider it, but since the practices are afterschool, it’s not likely. Sam and I are going to be going to OSU Lima in the afternoons.”

“I see.”

“So, you won’t be playing football, Sam?”

“I doubt it. I have no intention of pursuing football in college. It was supposed to be something fun to do in high school. I don’t have any aspirations of being a professional football player or anything. And even with the potential improvements to the locker room showers, I doubt I would be welcome.”

“Well, if you change your mind, Kurt, just let me know.”

“Will do. Is there anything else you need from us? We actually have an orientation meeting and
registration at OSU Lima to get to.”

“You’re free to leave.”

The two of them stood up and left.

When they all got home, Carole pulled out lunchmeat, cheese, bread and a few other things to make sandwiches with and some sliced raw vegetables and put them on the counter for a make-your-own lunch. They sat down to eat lunch together.

“So, what did you think?” Burt asked.

“Lots of good ideas,” Sam said. “It just depends on whether the school actually enforces them. Lack of access to the dumpsters is 100% good. Not allowing the slushies to leave the cafeteria should cut down on the slushie attacks, but plenty of ‘accidents’ could take place inside the cafeteria and outside in the courtyard. But we can be sure to put our bags and books in our lockers before we go into the cafeteria to cut down the risk of having anything besides our clothing ruined.”

“That one mom was something else,” Burt said.

“She’s not going to be happy after talking to Miss Pillsbury. That was Mrs. Adams. Her son is on the daily repeat offender list,” Kurt said.

“I see,” Carole said.

“He’s Karofsky’s best friend,” Sam added.

“Got it.”

“I’m excited to go to our orientation and registration this afternoon. With that new system that Miss Pillsbury talked about, I’m going to see if we can register for four classes at OSU and just take two at McKinley. Then we’d be able to leave school at about 10:00 and spend the rest of the day at the college. And there would be no reason whatsoever for me to be at the school when the jocks are there practicing.”

“Sounds like a good plan, honey.”

“Sam and I need to do a few things before we go. Can we be excused?”

“Sure. You can tell us what classes you chose later tonight.”

“I want you to learn a song to actually sing with me in Glee this afternoon, okay? I’ll have the band play. You can play your guitar and sing or just sing.”

“What’s the song?”

“I’m sure you’ve probably heard it before. I’m aggravated about how the Glee Club has behaved recently and I feel like expressing my feelings in song to make a point.”

“Alright.”

“I burned it to a CD so we can listen to it on the drive to campus. Give me your phone for a minute.”
Kurt pulled up the lyrics and took screenshots so Sam to study them. He gave the phone back. “Let’s grab our stuff and head to campus for our orientation. It’s chillier than I thought it was.” Kurt grabbed a red and black buffalo plaid jacket from their closet. Sam followed behind and grabbed a zip up hoodie and they left. They listened to the song on repeat all the way to campus.

After completing their orientation and campus tour, Kurt and Sam met with an advisor together since they wanted to have compatible schedules. They both opted to take their math courses and English courses at the university.

Kurt’s French score allowed him to by-pass and get credit for the first four college-level French courses. He chose a French grammar course to make sure that he was completely ready to take a French literature course in the spring. He opted for the costume design course instead of the European History course he had planned to take. Sam chose a pottery and a watercolor course.

Sam had brought his paperwork with his official dyslexia diagnosis, so once they had finished registering they headed to the disability services department. Kurt waited while Sam saw the advisor. She set him up with a plan allowing him extra time on written tests and a school-provided note taker for any class he needed to take notes in.

They headed back to McKinley, but had a little extra time, so they stopped and got two smoothies on the way back to the school. They arrived a few minutes before Glee was set to start.

They went straight to the choir room and found Miss Pillsbury working with a laptop that was hooked up to a printer on the table outside Mr. Shue’s office. She had an ironing board and an iron on the other side of the doorway to Mr. Schue’s office.

“What’s going on?” Kurt asked.

“Oh, it’s what Will is doing in Glee to help get the group back together after the destruction The Muckraker dealt everyone last week.”

“That was an interesting description that didn’t really answer the question.”

“I’m not sure that I’m allowed to say yet.”

“Alright. We’ll just wait.”

Sam and Kurt sat next to each other in the back row. Sam scooted his chair closer to Kurt’s so that their thighs were touching and he put his arm around the back of Kurt’s chair.

“Not going for subtle, I see.”

“Nope. I’ll kiss you, if you’ll let me.”

Kurt leaned toward him and kissed him instead.

“Get a room.” Artie said as he rolled in.

“Oh, because we’ve never seen you kiss anyone in this room?” Kurt asked.

“Our bitch ratio has suddenly improved dramatically,” Santana said as she came in with Dave in tow. She winked at Kurt. They sat on the opposite side of the room and Dave didn’t make eye contact.
Everyone else sat down and Mr. Schuester started talking.

“So, as you can see Miss Pillsbury is here today to help us with class. Each of you needs to quickly think of something that you have been embarrassed about yourself that you have come to terms with or some part of your personality that is part of who you are that you are learning to overcome or improve.” He unbuttoned his shirt and showed what was written on his. CURLS. “My curls have always been a sore spot for me. When I was a young child, I mistaken for a girl unless my mother kept my hair nearly shaved. I was teased. I’m still teased. It’s Sue’s go-to insult. I tried straightening it for a while, but I eventually came to the point where I just decided to leave it be and stop worrying about it.”

Miss Pillsbury turned around and showed her shirt, which said OCD.

“So, as quickly as you can come up and write your statement and your name on a piece of paper so she can get these set up to print and put on white t-shirts. We’re going to wear them in about 15 minutes.”

“Mr. Schue?” Kurt said as he raised his hand.

“Yes, Kurt.”

“I have a song I’d like to share today as well. Sam will be singing with me.”

“Alright. You can do that once everyone has turned their sheets in to Miss Pillsbury.”

“Thank you.”

Everyone finished quickly, put their sheet on the table where Miss Pillsbury was sitting, and went back to their seats.

“Alright, Kurt.”

He went over to the band and told them the song. And returned to the center to stand next to Sam, who had a guitar in his hands and was ready.

“So this song is for the people in this room and people in general who think they know what’s best for us or who think they have the right to meddle in our lives. It’s also a song that I think everyone in this room can identify with.” He nodded and they band started to play. Kurt sang the whole song. Sam joined in here and there and during the choruses singing harmony.

*Keep drinking coffee, stare me down across the table*
*While I look outside*
*So many things I'd say if only I were able*
*But I just keep quiet and count the cars that pass by*

*You've got opinions, man*
*We're all entitled to 'em, but I never asked*
*So let me thank you for your time,*
*And try not to waste anymore of mine*
*And get out of here fast*

*I hate to break it to you babe, but I'm not drowning*
*There's no one here to save*

*Who cares if you disagree?*
You are not me
Who made you king of anything?
So you dare tell me who to be?
Who died and made you king of anything?

You sound so innocent, all full of good intent
Swear you know best
But you expect me to jump up on board with you
And ride off into your delusional sunset

I'm not the one who's lost with no direction
But you'll never see
You're so busy making maps with my name on them in all caps
You got the talking down, just not the listening

And who cares if you disagree?
You are not me
Who made you king of anything?
So you dare tell me who to be?
Who died and made you king of anything?

All my life I've tried to make everybody happy
While I just hurt and hide
Waiting for someone to tell me it's my turn to decide

Who cares if you disagree?
You are not me
Who made you king of anything?
So you dare tell me who to be?
Who died and made you king of anything?

“This song was to remind each of us how much we don’t want other people to decide what’s right for us or to tell us what we can or cannot do. For a group of people who purport to be friends, you didn’t display that recently. You told me that you wanted me to come back to McKinley. And then you turned on each other and on me and Sam. That was NOT the way to do it. I’ve decided to give most of you a second or third of fiftieth chance. But this is your final chance. If you turn on me or on Sam again, that’s it. There are enough people in this town who hate me – and now him. I don’t need to voluntarily subject myself to more abuse. We need to be a real group of friends. Celebrate our differences, not attack each other. And learn to communicate, not gossip. End of rant.”

“That’s a good reminder, Kurt. And that is a good lead into our activity for today. We’re going to head to the auditorium and work on some loose choreography while Miss Pillsbury continues to work on the shirts. Perhaps, Dave can stay behind to help her?”

“Um, yeah, sure.”

“Everyone else get up and let’s go.”

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They took seats in the auditorium and Mr. Schue handed out the lyrics. They divided everything up and got up on stage and started to work out some choreography and sang through the song a few times. Miss Pillsbury and Dave brought the shirts down about 30 minutes later. Miss Pillsbury handed their shirts out. They headed into the dressing rooms and changed. Several people put their
jackets back on over the top, not yet revealing what they had chosen.

Dave sat in the audience. Miss Pillsbury and Mr. Schue stood along the edge and watched the students perform.

Kurt entered the stage in his shirt that said LIKES BOYS and moved to the middle and sang out:

\begin{verbatim}
It doesn't matter if you love him, or capital H-I-M
Just put your paws up 'cause you were born this way, baby
\end{verbatim}

Mercedes and Tina joined him on the stage. Tina’s shirt said SHY. She sang:

\begin{verbatim}
My mama told me when I was young
We are all born superstars
She rolled my hair and put my lipstick on
In the glass of her boudoir
\end{verbatim}

Mercedes sang the next section. Her shirt said BOSSY. The curtains opened back and the rest of the group was on the stage. The lead switched throughout the song, with the whole group singing the choruses. At various points in time, they all revealed the words on their shirts and tossed their jackets off the front of the stage. Mr. Schue and Miss Pillsbury joined them on stage near the end.

When they had finished, they all joined in hugging each other. Sam kept his arm around Kurt’s waist even after they stepped back from their group hug.

Mercedes was the first to approach Kurt. The three of them stepped away from the group a little.

“I’m really sorry, Kurt. It’s been months since we’ve spent time together. And that’s my own fault. I have a car. I could have driven to Westerville to see you. I let my feelings get bruised when you and I butted heads in the fall. I just couldn’t wrap my head around how you could not believe in God. After what happened last week, I sat down and talked to my mom. She set me straight the way moms do.”

Kurt laughed and nodded.

“I was wrong. Just because I believe in God doesn’t mean that you have to or that I’m better because I do. I was a bully. And then last week I was stupid. I know that you wouldn’t cheat on someone you care about. It’s just those pictures really threw me. With all the cheating that has gone on in this group and the partner swapping, the part about Quinn going back to Sam seemed plausible, but then you were in the same place with them. I was stupid not to just ask. Not that you had to tell me because I know you wouldn’t have. But even when you all three denied the accusations, we just wouldn’t relent. We need to learn to mind our own business. When a friend says they can’t tell, it means that they’re keeping their word to someone else or they just can’t share the information for some valid reason.”

“Yeah. You need to learn to trust me. And you don’t right now. I don’t trust you either anymore. If we’re going to be friends again, we’ll have to rebuild that trust.”

“I get that. I really do. But I am sorry. I’ll call you and we can talk more.”

“Alright.” Kurt offered her a hug, which she accepted.
She reached out and put her hand on Sam’s arm. “Sam, I really blew it. We weren’t close before, but now I know you don’t trust me and I don’t blame you. All I can say is that you must really care about Kurt to be willing to withstand the crap this town is going to throw at you for it. He’s worth it though.”

“I agree. He’s definitely worth it.” He had a huge smile on his face and pulled Kurt closer to him, causing Kurt to smile too.

“Well, thanks for listening.”

“Sure.”

She walked back toward the dressing room to change back into her regular clothes. So did Kurt and Sam. Everyone met back and sat in the auditorium.

Kurt raised his hand.

“Yes, Kurt.”

He stood up and hopped up on the edge of the stage and sat facing them. “I have some suggestions that you can use or ignore. Don’t buy new costumes for Nationals. The outfits the girls wore for Sectionals looked really good. Use those. Have the guys wear the outfits from Regionals, but add white bow ties and put the white spats covers we wore in “Toxic” on the black shoes. No cost and the combination would look really good together. I looked through the rules online. There’s no rule that says you can’t sing songs from Sectionals or Regionals. I think that the songs you sang for Regionals were great. And the choreography for “Valerie” was amazing. If you could find a single upbeat group song or write one and use the choreography from ‘Valerie’, I think that combination would be amazing. ‘Loser Like Me’ needs to be rechoreographed. It was haphazard and looked just barely passable, but nowhere near Nationals-level good. Just don’t show up in New York unprepared. It might be the only time a lot of you ever get to go to New York. Most of us have never flown or been anywhere more than 100 miles from here. Be ready to perform when you get there so that you can go see as many things as you can and have as much fun as possible. Showing up and trying to choose songs or write new ones and create choreography after you get there would be so stressful and would just ruin the whole trip. The venue for Nationals rotates, so even if we make it again next year, it will be held somewhere else.”

Rachel was the one to speak first. “I agree with Kurt about preparing ahead of time. I know we sort of do this crazy last-minute, high-stress, pull-it-all-together-at-the-last-second thing every competition, but I want to enjoy New York.”

Tina spoke up next. “What Kurt said about the costuming is true. We should mix and match what we have just like he described and we’ll look really classy.”

“Thanks for the suggestions, Kurt,” Mr. Schue said.

He nodded and went and sat back down next to Sam.

“That’s it for today guys. I hope everyone had fun. We’ll discuss a set list the next time we meet. I agree that we need to be ready when we leave. No last-minute nonsense this time.”

Sam headed to work and Kurt went home. He had convinced the two students he tutored to let him do it over Skype so he could stay in Lima for the night and drive back the next morning. While Sam was at work, he started on his reading and some assignments that he needed to do in addition to the
About 5:00, Rachel showed up. Kurt let her in the house and she sat down in the chair in the living room.

“Can I get you something to drink?”

“No thanks.”

Kurt sat down on the couch.

“I came over to apologize. I went to see a new therapist. She and I discussed a lot of things. I was really angry about a lot of things. She took notes and then wrote things on a white board in her office. Once I saw things written on the board, I guess I had an epiphany of sorts. I realized that I’ve been using Glee Club as a way to compensate for my social position at the school. By insisting that I am the best and putting myself at the top, I was gaining this sense of accomplishment. It made me feel like I was actually good. Even though I’m in lots of clubs and I do my homework, I’m not popular in any of those clubs, even the ones that I’m the president or vice president of. And I’m not a straight A student like you. I considered you to be my main rival because we have similar musical interest in Broadway and we have similar vocal ranges. But it was stupid of me to consider you a rival. You’re a boy. We would never compete for the same roles in a play or musical unless the casting is based purely on vocal skills, like we’d all be in animal costumes or something.”

“Right...”

“I just wanted something for me. Something to make me feel good about myself. So many people hate me. I know that you get bullied more than I do physically, but I the verbal bullying really takes its toll on me. And it was wrong of me to stalk Quinn. I get so angry with her. But I shouldn’t have let my anger blind me to what I was doing to you and Sam.”

“Did you come here because your dads made you?”

“Actually no. I’m sure I’ll get in trouble when I get home. I asked Tina to bring me here. She’s waiting outside. By being here, I’m breaking my grounding.”

“I see. Look, I get wanting to be the best at something and I get wanting people to appreciate your talent. You’re just going about it the wrong way. You have to learn to get along with the rest of the group. No one wants to work with a spoiled child. I know you want to make it on Broadway. Making enemies and annoying people is not the way to do it. Think about this. Who is the best tailor or seamstress in Glee?”

“You. Well, Tina because you’re at Dalton.”

“Best guitarist?”

“I’m not actually sure.”

“Best piano player?”

“Best dancer?”
“Male – Mike. Female – Brittany.”

“Best gospel or R&B singer?”

“Mercedes.”

“Do any of the people you actually named need to TELL the other people in the group that they’re the best at those things?”

“No.”

“Think about that, Rachel. Everyone KNOWS that you’re the best for Broadway tunes and for some styles of music. You don’t need to tell anyone.”

She nodded. “I just want to win.”

“I know you do, Rachel. Everyone knows that. The problem is that Mr. Schue has become too dependent on your ability to lead the group at the last minute. That’s not the way the club should work. You all are going to Nationals in five weeks. The set list should already be settled. You all should be working on perfecting the vocals already.”

“You’re right.”

“Is there anything specific you have to say? You said you came to apologize and mostly you just talked about yourself and Glee Club.”

“Oh, right. I came to apologize for following Quinn and causing all of the problems for Sam.”

“That’s something you should apologize to him for. Not me.”

“I’ll do that tomorrow at school.”

“Well, I have homework to get to if there’s nothing else.”

She got up and he closed and locked the door behind her. He went back upstairs.

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Kurt and Sam enjoyed their extra evening at home together once Sam got home from work.

“I’m not sure I like your shirt,” Sam said when he threw his shirt and what he was wearing into the laundry.

Kurt look confused. “Why not?”

“I don’t want you liking boys.”

Kurt laughed. “Well, he said to put something I had to work to accept about myself. It took time for me to accept that liking boys was okay. But see now, I’m nearly an adult and I don’t like boys anymore.” He stripped as he got closer to the closet. “You see, now I’m in love with one particularly gorgeous man. Just slightly taller than me. Great sense of humor. Smart. Hardworking. Really nice voice. Amazing smile. Sweet. Fantastic laugh. He treats me like I’m really special.” By that point, Kurt had cornered Sam in the closet and they were both in their underwear. “And the most amazing thing is that this awesome man loves me back.” He pressed his lips to Sam’s and kissed him. He wrapped his arms around Sam’s neck and deepened the kiss. “I love you, Sam Evans. No more boys. Just you.”
Sam was out of breath. “I love you too. Just you.”

Kurt grabbed his hand and led him to the shower.

After breakfast, Kurt stuck his dishes in the dishwasher and closed it. “I have to get going. I need to get to Dalton. I’ve missed a lot of classes dealing with this stuff. Unlike McKinley, the teachers at Dalton actually teach things during class that are NOT in the textbooks, so I have to get notes from a couple of different people to make sure I don’t miss any information.”

“We’ll see you Friday, honey.”

“See ya, kiddo.”

Kurt got up and headed upstairs to grab his stuff. Before he managed to grab everything, he heard Sam come in the room behind him. He ended up sitting everything down and he turned around. Sam wrapped his arms around him and Kurt did the same. They stood hugging for a couple of minutes.

“I’ll call you tonight. You can find out from Carole if you can use Finn’s computer to Skype me.”

“I’ll see.”

“I hope things are okay for you at school this week. I hate leaving you to face that madhouse alone.” He kissed Sam. “I love you.”

“I love you too. I’ll help you carry this stuff outside.” He stepped back.

Kurt stepped forward and kissed him again. He turned back around and grabbed his satchel and his suitcase. Sam grabbed his books.

“So the College and Career course is ending this week. Did it help you make some decisions about your future? Is there anything you think the course should cover that it didn’t?”

“It did help a lot. Without it, I would have gone into the college application process with a lot less information than I have now. I have made some definite changes to my short-term plans, but I haven’t changed my end goal.”

“How did the assembly go Monday?”

“We’ll just have to wait and see. My boyfriend still got called names yesterday and he’s had notes put in his locker this week. Vague threats like ‘You better not even consider playing football next year’. And ‘No fags in the locker room.’ Things like that.”

“And how about around here?”

“They’re fine. I’m doing all of my work and I’m doing well in my classes. That’s what matters to me. I’ve made three friends and I’ve assimilated as much as possible.”

“I did ask about what you had suggested.”

Kurt looked puzzled.

“You had mentioned being willing to take your exams during reading week and finishing early.”
“Yes.”

“The Headmaster is willing to consider it. Since you don’t have any AP exams to study for, you have time to write your final papers during the two weeks that most of the juniors and seniors will be taking the AP exams.”

“I can do that. I am definitely willing to do that.”

“Alright. You would need to stay through reading week until at least Thursday. You are tutoring a lot of students and leaving them without someone to help them review for their finals would not be acceptable.”

“Of course.” Kurt pulled out his phone. “So, I could leave on the 19th?”

Mr. Adam’s flipped to May’s calendar on his desk. “Yes.”

“That’s what I would like to do then. I’d actually like to find out if there’s a way to have my stuff graded so that I can take my official transcript for this year with me, so I can go ahead and transfer back to McKinley and choose my classes for next fall.”

“I’ll see what I can find out and let you know next week. Get started on those final papers. Those take longer for the teachers to grade than the final exams.”

“I’ll do that. I need to get going so I’m not late to my tutoring session. Thank you for all of your help, Mr. Adams.”

“You’re welcome, Kurt.” Kurt grabbed his bag and headed up to the study room to his tutoring session.

Kurt had Sam’s dinner ready for him when he got home Friday night. They ate quickly, cleaned up after the dishes, and headed upstairs. Kurt shut and locked the door behind them. He and Sam had the house to themselves until whenever Burt and Carole got back from their date. Finn’s grounding had ended and he had gone to Artie’s for the night.

“Are you sure you don’t want to go to Artie’s with the rest of the guys?”

“I’m sure I don’t want to. With Finn gone, you and I can play video games by ourselves.”

“Sure. But first, I need to unpack, shower, and put my pajamas on.” Kurt kissed him and grabbed his suitcase and started dumping the clothes from it into his laundry basket. He emptied out the other stuff and put the suitcase under his bed. “Shower with me?”

Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt. “Definitely.”

“BAM! He’s dead.”

Sam laughed. “Much better. A week of practice after school gets out and you’ll be as good as the rest of the guys.”

“I want to be able to hold my own against Puck. That’s how good I need to get.”

“Oh, I believe you can do it. You’re already really good. You just need more to practice more, to get
more familiar with how the game is played.”

“Thanks. Finn mostly just rolled his eyes and made excuses when I asked him to play with me.”

“Ah, well, I’d bet that he’s afraid that you’re better at it than him and you’ll show him up.”

“Oh, another one of the many ways gay guys can’t be better at than straight guys or they feel emasculated?”

“Exactly.”

“Like after I won the football game, they hoisted me up and in the moment everyone was thrilled. But after they were teased for the dancing, they were torn between the excitement and the embarrassment. And within a week, it was all back to normal.”

“I didn’t even know you had played until I found out from Tina and Mercedes when they were talking about it after the girls joined the team so we wouldn’t have to forfeit. They mentioned that we’d have a lot better chance if you were the kicker still.”

“It’s all a part of misogynistic culture that considers toxic masculinity the apex of being a real man.”

“This conversation has gotten way too serious. We’re supposed to be mindlessly killing things and wasting time as teenagers. And you’re psychoanalyzing people’s views on gender roles in society.”

Sam put his controller next to Kurt’s on the coffee table and pushed Kurt onto his back and started tickling him.

Kurt let out a surprised yelp and started laughing. He managed to free an arm and wrapped his hand around the back of Sam’s neck and pull himself up and kiss him. The kiss slowed the tickle attack and Kurt got his other hand free and pulled Sam down on top of him.

“I thought we were playing video games,” Sam said.

“You seemed to want my attention, so now you have it. My 100%.” Kiss. “Undivided.” Kiss. “Attention.” He licked his way into Sam’s more than willing mouth.

Sam relaxed down onto Kurt and let himself be caught up in kissing Kurt. When they broke apart for air, Sam reached out for the controller and turned his head toward the screen and powered the game system down and picked up the TV remote and turned it off. He turned back to Kurt and kissed him gently. “Let’s take this upstairs.” He stood up and pulled Kurt up to standing. They headed upstairs.

Sam locked the door behind them. Kurt headed into the bathroom, came back out, and sat at his vanity to do his nighttime moisturizing. Sam brushed his teeth and sat on the end of the bed and watched Kurt. As soon as he finished, he turned the lights off and turned some music on. He walked over to the vanity and held his hand out. Kurt turned the vanity lights off and took Sam’s hand. Sam pulled Kurt close and wrapped his arms around Kurt.

“Teach me to dance, like you did Finn. I want to be able to dance with you. Real couple’s dances.”

“M’kay.” He looked around the room for the other source of dim light.

“They’re nightlights. I put one in the outlets on both of the side shelves of the bed.”

“I like them.”

They sway danced around the room. Sam moved in the general direction of the bed after a couple of
songs. He grabbed the bottom of Kurt’s t-shirt and pulled it up over his head and did the same to his own. Kurt took the hint and slipped his pajama pants off, pulled the covers back, and climbed into the bed. He scooted over to his own side and Sam slipped in next to him.

“I wanted us to be able to see each other when we talk and kiss at night. You’re beautiful and well, I just like looking at you. Your smile, well you smile a lot and it just makes me really happy.”

“Being around you makes me happy, so that’s why I smile. You’re probably the only person in the world that thinks I smile a lot.”

“So the nightlights are okay?”

“Can they be turned off if they keep me awake?”

“Yeah, they have little switches on them.”

“Perfect.”

“So, tomorrow?”

“I’m getting up early and going in to work at the shop like normal, but just earlier than usual. Then Dad wants me to stay to do some extra stuff, which is why I’m going in early because I still want to be home by 2:00. So, you can get as much of you homework as you can while I’m gone.”

“Boring, but okay.”

“Then when I get back, I’m going to take you somewhere. Just wear your normal clothes.”

“A surprise?”

“A surprise.”

“I like surprises.”

“I know you do.”

“Now, I’m excited and I can’t sleep.”

“Good thing I know a really enjoyable way to make you tired.”
Kurt tried to carefully move Sam’s arm from where it was wrapped around him, but he wasn’t successful in getting up. Sam just snuffled a little and pulled him closer. Kurt laughed without making any sound. Sam stirred just a bit and kissed the back of his neck and scooted closer. Kurt put more effort into moving Sam’s arm, but he was determined to not let go.

“Sam, sweetie, I have to get up to go to the shop.”

“S’not even light outside. S’till nighttime.” He kissed Kurt’s shoulder. “S’till time to sleep.”

“Sweetie, it’s 5:45. I need to get up and get started so we can do what I planned this afternoon.”

“Mmm. Snuggle.”

Kurt laughed. “Loosen your grip a little so I can roll over to face you.”

“M’kay.”

Kurt rolled over and kissed Sam, which was a bad move. Sam doubled down on holding him close and wrapped his leg over Kurt’s pinning him in place. Kurt started laughing.

“Sweetie, this koala bear snuggle is really amazing, but I really want to take you out this afternoon.” He kissed him again. “I have a really fun first date planned for us. Please let me go so I can get my work done first and not aggravate my dad.”

“M’kay. S’not fair. S’till dark.” Sam let go and flopped over onto his back.

“Just barely. The sun will be up soon. You can sleep for a little longer.” Kurt kissed him. “I love you. Be ready at 2:00.”

“M’kay. Love you too.”

Kurt rushed through the bedroom door straight into the bathroom to take a fast shower. He came out, dressed in black jeans, his black Chucks, and a dark wine t-shirt with small black skulls and crossbones on it. He shoved his wallet in his back pocket, his phone in his front pocket, and grabbed his keys. Sam stacked his books up on the bookshelves and stood by the door while Kurt did this mad dash. As soon as Kurt had picked his keys up, Sam stepped close enough to kiss him.

“Was that your Flash impersonation?”

“Yes. Come on. You can tell me how well I did while I drive.”

Kurt slipped past him and practically ran down the stairs and back outside. Sam hurried and followed along. He got in the Navigator and shut his door. Kurt started to back up, but didn’t actually pull out into the street until Sam’s seatbelt was fastened. As soon as he heard the click, he took off.

“Why the hurry?”

“I’m excited. I’ve been looking forward to our first date for a long time. I know we’ve been together
for like a month and a half, but we’ve not gone out, unless the walk in the woods counts.”

“I liked the walk in the woods.”

“Me too, but I’ve been planning this and I hope you really like where we’re going.”

“You’re going to be there, so of course, I’ll like it.”

“There you go with the sweet talking.” Kurt reached over and took his hand.

Kurt headed north, out of town.

“Where are we going?”

“It’s a surprise.”

“Still?”

“Yep. How was Glee this week?”

“Well, Tina took your idea and she and Mike dressed up wearing what you suggested and showed everyone. And that’s what we’re wearing for Nationals.”

“Excellent. That should save a lot of money and time.”

“And the song selection?”

“We’re working on writing another song, but no one’s come up with anything amazing yet. Mike and Brittany are rechoreographing ‘Loser Like Me’. Mr. Schue is re-arranging it as well. Other people will be singing the lead besides Rachel and Finn. He’s trying to make it so that everyone who wants to be featured gets to be since there’s no way of knowing whether we’ll make it again next year.”

“Sounds a lot more fair than I had expected.”

“It is.”

“Do things seem better overall?”

“Not yet. The jocks that have been the main perpetrators are pissed. The new rules go in effect completely on Monday, so we’ll see. I honestly think the school will have to put up surveillance cameras like we have at the gas station if they really want the bullying to stop. If a student can still intimidate another student verbally or harass people by putting notes in their lockers, they will. With surveillance cameras up, I think the notes in the locker would stop. The verbal intimidation is hard to stop because there’s little to no way to prove it. Plus, it just makes me wonder if the bullying will just move off school grounds now. I guess I just feel like unless those guys have a real change of heart and change the way they think, all of the rules aren’t going to help.”

“It’s hard not to feel that way. But all we can do is hope for the best I suppose. And the trick to preventing the notes in your locker is duct tape or clear packing tape. Take some to school Monday and cover over the vent holes. Then tape a small poster on the inside to cover up the duct tape. You can fasten a baking soda air freshener to the top since it won’t be able to air out. I used to put scented candles in mine.”
“I’ll do that Monday. I will say that Azimio hasn’t said or done anything to me since the assembly.”

“His mom was very upset by the whole thing. I’m imagining he’s in a lot of trouble at home.”

About 30 minutes later, Kurt said, “Close your eyes.”

Sam did as he was asked. Kurt turned down the street and into the parking lot. He pulled around the back so that Sam couldn’t see the name of the place. He parked and they got out and walked along the side of the building to the entrance. They stepped inside and Kurt moved quickly so he could see Sam’s face when he got inside.

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“This place is awesome.”

Kurt pushed up onto his toes. “You like it?”

“Let’s play.”

They got in line and Kurt bought tickets.

“I have never seen glow-in-the-dark mini golf. Someone had an awesome idea,” Sam said, as they picked out their clubs and balls and went to start through the course.

“I wanted to find something really different to do for our first date. We’ll still go to Breadstix some time, but I thought this would be really fun.”

“It’s really cool.” Sam put his ball down on the mat, took a swing and sent his ball rolling down the course.

Kurt went next. He followed his ball to its stopping point. “This is harder than it looks,” he laughed. “I’ve never played any kind of golf. We don’t have a mini-golf course.”

“I’ve never seen one indoors. I’ve been to an outdoor one before when we lived in Tennessee, but the glow-in-the-dark course is way cool. I love the dinosaurs.”

They played through the 18 holes and when they finished Kurt headed over to the snack area and Sam followed him. “What kind of ice cream do you want?”

Sam looked at the choices. “Chocolate chocolate chip and hot fudge swirl.”

“I’m getting strawberry cheesecake and umm…butter pecan.”

They waited their turn and placed their orders. They moved down to wait.

“Grab mine. I’ll be right back.”

Sam took both cones and walked in the direction Kurt had gone. Kurt was already on his way back by the time Sam got to the tables and he took his ice cream cone from Sam, but his other hand was behind his back.

“This is good.” Kurt sat down at the closest table.

“It is. This is a fun place.” Sam sat down next to him.

Kurt put his other hand in his lap before putting it up on the table. They sat and talked a little, but
mostly ate their ice cream. Once they finished, Kurt put his hand back in his lap and pulled out a cup and sat it on the table.

“What’s that?”
Kurt took the lid off.

“Tokens?”

“Yep, for the arcade. Ready?”

“There’s a ton of them.”

“There’s 100. Come on.”

They headed into the game room. They played air hockey, Skeeball, Fruit Ninja, PacMan, Galaga, Dance Dance Revolution and a bunch of other games. By the time they ran out of tokens, it was close to 6:30.

“Let’s go pick our prizes.”

They looked through the prizes and settled on a glow in the dark Frisbee with the playland’s logo on it and spent the change buying tiny Tootsie Rolls.

Once they were close to the Navigator, Kurt unlocked it with his remote. Instead of getting into the driver’s seat, he opened the back door and got in. Sam didn’t notice until he had opened the passenger door, which he quickly shut and opened the back door and got in. Kurt had already slid to the center of the seat. Sam shut the door behind him and turned to look at Kurt and gave him a puzzled look.

“It’s a lot harder to kiss you in the front.”
Sam smiled and leaned forward to kiss him.

They kissed for a few minutes before Kurt pulled back and said, “Let’s move back to the front so we can head out. I don’t want to get carried away in a parking lot.”

Sam nodded and kissed him gently one more time and opened his door. They got in the front and Kurt drove out of the parking lot. He drove a few minutes and pulled into a parking lot and grabbed a Hot ‘n Ready pizza and put it in the back. He drove for about 10 minutes and pulled off the road into a park.

“Grab the pizza. I put some drinks in the back earlier. I’ll get them.”

Sam waited for Kurt and they headed to a small picnic shelter and ate. When Kurt tossed the box in the back to throw out later, he grabbed the Frisbee. They played for about a half hour before they got back in the SUV to head back to Lima. They talked about whatever came to mind and listened to and sang along with the CD Kurt had in on the way back.

Kurt grabbed the box and tossed it in the outside garbage can on their way in. He left the Frisbee in the back for future use. Sam had unlocked the front door, but hadn’t opened it yet.
“I had a great time.”

“I’m glad. Let’s go in.”

“Did you boys have fun?” Carole asked as they came in.

“It was awesome.” Sam took his phone out and showed Carole the pictures he took. “The pictures don’t do it justice, of course. But it was really cool.”

“It looks cool.” She looked through the pictures and gave his phone back.

They headed straight into the shower when they got up to their room. Sam turned the nightlights on and got in bed and waited for Kurt to finish his moisturizing routine. He turned the vanity lights off and got in bed with Sam.

“You’re awfully quiet,” Kurt said.

“Oh, I was just thinking about this afternoon and evening.”

“Yes, of course. It was a lot of fun, but I didn’t expect you to spend so much money.”

“Oh, don’t worry about that. I just wanted our first date to be completely unforgettable and totally unique. I’ll plan free dates for a while after this.”

“Okay. I just don’t want you to think that you have to spend a bunch of money to make me happy.”

“I know. And you don’t have to spend a bunch of money to make me happy either.” Kurt scooted closer and turned on his side. He moved Sam’s arm and put his head on Sam’s shoulder and wrapped his arm around Sam’s chest. He ran his fingers along Sam’s cheek.

Sam wrapped his arm around Kurt’s shoulders and pulled him close enough to kiss. “Just getting to spend time with you is perfect.”

“Sweet talker.”

“It’s true.”

“Thank you.” Kurt relaxed in Sam’s arms and snuggled in. “I love you.”

“I love you too.” Sam kissed the top of Kurt’s head.

Mr. Adams asked, “How’s your plan to get everything done early going?”

“Pretty well. I’m staying here this weekend. I told my dad the plan this past weekend, so he’s gotten someone to cover my shift Saturday morning. I should be able to get both of my final papers done.”

“That’s good. I’ll have the semester review sheets for you next week. They’re typically given out the week before reading week, but I’ll give you yours a week early since you’ll be taking your exams a week early. The details have been worked out for that. You’ll be taking them in the office where you’ve met with Mrs. Huntington. You’ll leave everything you’re not allowed to have with Miss
Burns, who will have the exams for you.”

“Alright.”

“Has anything changed with your situation here or do you have anything else you’d like to talk about?”

“Not really.”

“You mentioned that you had changed your short-term goals the last time we talked. Tell me about that.”

“I’m going to find a school in Ohio to go to or go to wherever I can get a scholarship. So, I have a couple of places in mind to apply to that according to their websites, tend to offer generous financial aid packages to the right candidates. I’ll see if I’m one of those ‘right’ candidates. And I’ll apply to a few Ohio colleges for early admission. If I can’t get into a musical theatre or design program, then I’ll have to reconsider my options and apply for regular admission in another field.”

“I see.”

“If all else fails, I can work at my dad’s shop for a year, save up money, and apply again the next year.”

“So, you’ve given up on going to New York City?”

“That’s my long-term goal. I’ll need to save up before I can do that. Living there is incredibly expensive. I’ll need close to $10,000 saved up, I think. I have time to do more research if I’m not going for another five years.”

“I suppose you do.”

“I’m glad I found out, but it’s really disappointing. I’m trying to work through that and start working on goal setting and doing a lot of planning.”

“Sounds like you’ve got it covered, then.”

“I hope so.”

“Hey, Kurt!” Sam said as he answered his phone.

*Happy birthday to you.*

*Happy birthday to you.*

*Happy birthday, dear Sam.*

*Happy birthday to you.*

“Happy birthday, sweetie. I hope you’re having fun with your family this weekend.”

“It’s been fun. I miss you though.”

“I miss you too. I’ll be home Friday night. We’ll celebrate next weekend. I finished one paper yesterday and I’m going to get the other one done today hopefully.”

“I hope so. I know you’ve been working really hard.”
“I won’t keep you. Tell everyone ‘hi’ from me. I love you.”

“I will. I love you too.”

Mr. Adams handed Kurt a file folder. “Here are the review sheets for your classes.”

Kurt reached out and took the folder. He pulled the sheets out and put them in his binder. He pulled the two papers he had written out of his binder and put them in the file folder and handed it back. “I wasn’t sure what I was supposed to do with the papers, so I printed them out. If the teachers would prefer a digital copy like we usually turn in, you’ll need to get them to open the dropbox for those assignments and let me know that they’re open, so I can upload them.”

“I’m sure this is fine, but if there’s a problem, I’ll let you know.”

“Thanks.”

“Any trouble with the tutoring or anything else I can help you with?”

“Nope, no trouble. And you’ve been more helpful than any teacher or staff member of a school that I’ve ever met. I appreciate that.”

“You’re welcome?”

“Coming here has been a nice reprieve from the daily insanity that I called school. Has the school ever considered a weeklong immersion program with a local public school?”

“What do you mean?”

“I think it might really do the students here a lot of good if the semester started a week early and then some time during the middle of the semester have maybe the students spend a week in a public school. I think the students should see what an unusual situation they have here. Maybe it would give them just a tiny bit more empathy for the students who come here due to problems with their previous schools. Maybe when students transfer in it would help them be more understanding. Public school students have been offered less complete educations. They arrive so far behind academically that it’s hard for them to not feel inundated and like there’s little hope of catching up. And the students here just see a student who looks less intelligent rather than just less educated.”

“You find the schooling that different?”

“Seriously? Let me guess. You went to private schools.”

“I went to school here.”

“I see. No wonder you’ve considered our sessions interesting. I think you should do the same thing. Take a week off here and spend it shadowing a guidance counselor at a struggling public school. It would give you a perspective you could use to help the students who come here from those types of environments. I’m a year behind the students in my grade here. The three Warblers I’ve been spending time with are sophomores. And they’re ahead of me in math. I have had several long talks with them about the differences in public school and private school.”

“I’ll see what the administration thinks.”

“Anything else?”
“Not that I can think of. You’re free to go.”

“Thank you, Mr. Adams.”

Sam came into the dining room to eat with Kurt when he got off work. He had one hand behind his back and he stood behind the chair he normally sat in next to Kurt. Instead of sitting down, he knelt. He offered Kurt a single red rose and asked, “Kurt, will you go to Prom with me?”

“Really?”

“Yes, really. I love you and I want to go to Junior Prom with you.”

“Of course, I’ll go with you.” He leaned forward and kissed Sam. “I’m going to go get a vase for this. I’ll be right back.” He came back in a few minutes later carrying a single bud vase with the rose in it and sat it on the table.

“This is good.”

“It’s some kind of chicken casserole that Carole made. We’ll have to ask her for the recipe.”

“So, is there a Prom theme?”

“Not that I’ve heard. Quinn and Finn, Santana and David, Lauren and Puck, and two other couples that I don’t know are all running for Prom Queen and King.”

“I see.”

“It doesn’t matter to me. I just want to go and dance with you.”

“Is that why you had me start teaching you to dance a few weeks ago?”

“It most certainly is, but I wanted to actually see that the physical bullying had stopped before I asked you. I want to go with you, but I didn’t want us to be on the receiving end of any bullying. Coach Sue guaranteed our safe entry and departure by providing us a personal escort.”

“Who?”

“She’ll be escorting us herself.”

“I see. Well, whatever works, I suppose.”

They finished eating and Sam grabbed their stuff and put it in the dishwasher. Kurt grabbed the vase and they went upstairs.

“What’s all this?”

“It’s the stuff we need to make our hoodies. I got one for you and one for me and the paints we need.”

“Very cool.”

“I worked on my sketch.”
“Let me see.”

Kurt turned the sketchpad to the page of his most recent effort at drawing what he wanted to put on his hoodie.

“That’s really good.”

“Thanks. Ready to start?”

“Let’s take a really quick shower.”

“Okay.”

They showered quickly and put on pajama pants and sat down on the floor to work on their hoodies. After a couple of hours, they both declared themselves to have completed their wearable works of art. Sam imitated Kurt’s style so that their designs would look similar. He helped Kurt a little with the shading. Kurt hung them on the shower rod to dry overnight. Sam started cleaning up and Kurt washed the brushes.

“Where should I put these paints?”

“In the cabinet where I keep the other art stuff.”

“Got it.”

Kurt laid the brushes out to dry, and then headed back out to the bedroom. Sam had already turned the nightlights and music on and the overhead lights off. He was in bed waiting for Kurt.

Kurt got in bed and kissed Sam. They lay close, facing each other.

“That was fun. I’ve never painted on clothing before.”

“I’ve done little things here and there, but never an actual painting like that. And I thought it was fun too. So, tomorrow morning, I’m going to get up early again and go in to work before the shop opens so I can still leave at noon. Dad still has me helping him on a project.”

“So, I’ll do homework until noon. Then what?”

“Lunch. Whatever we can find in the fridge. Then, it’s birthday celebration time.”

“Nothing expensive.”

“Nothing expensive. It’s a surprise though.”

“You and the surprises,” Sam teased.

“You love them and I know it.” He kissed Sam.

“I do.”

“I have plans for Sunday too. So, really focus on the homework. Whatever you need help with, we’ll do when we’re here tomorrow evening.”

“Got it. Be studious,” he said in a very serious tone, sounding like Morpheus.

Kurt laughed. He flopped over on his other side, letting Sam scoot up behind him to go to sleep.
Kurt came in the room and saw Sam stacking his textbooks up and closing down Kurt’s laptop.

“Did you make a lot of progress?”

“Yeah. I think we can finish it up tonight.”

Kurt went in the bathroom and grabbed their hoodies and handed Sam’s to him. “Put it on.”

Sam took off the shirt he was wearing and put it on the bed and put the hoodie on instead. “What do you think?”

“It looks great. How about mine?”

“Awesome.”

“You need shoes.”

“Nope. I need kisses.” Sam grabbed Kurt and tossed him on the bed.

“Hey! I have plans.”

“Mmm hmm. Me too. Kissing you.”


After a few minutes, Sam pushed up onto his hands and got the rest of the way up. He offered a hand up to Kurt and pulled him to standing. Kurt wrapped his arms around Sam. “Thank you.”

“For kissing you? Any time.” He tickled Kurt a little. “My pleasure.”

“Yes, for kissing me. Sometimes I get too focused on my plans. Kissing me reminded me about enjoying the journey, not just focusing on the destination.”

“You’re always so philosophical, which is good, but some old fashioned silliness is good for you too.” Sam started tickling him again.

Kurt was laughing too hard to get a word in edgewise.

Sam kissed him gently. “I love you.”

“I love you too. Are you ready to go now?”

“Yes. I’ll grab my shoes.” Sam went in the closet and pulled out the red Chucks Kurt had given him and put them on. “Do I need anything?”

“Nope. Just your awesome self.”

“What about lunch?”

“It’s ready. I made it before I came upstairs. It’s just sandwiches and some raw veggies.”

“Sounds perfect.”
Kurt parked on the street. He slipped something out of the glove box and then got out of the SUV and walked around and waited for Sam on the sidewalk. He walked down the street about half the block and stopped. Sam’s eyes got huge.

“Lima has a comic book store?”

“It does indeed.” Kurt pulled what he had removed from the glove box from his back pocket and handed it to Sam.

Sam took it and opened it up. “A gift certificate?”

“Happy birthday, Sam. Come on. Let’s go inside. You’re going to love it.”

Kurt opened the door and Sam stepped inside. They were greeted almost instantaneously.

“Welcome to Alter Ego.”

“Thank you,” Kurt responded.

“Those are great hoodies.”

“Thanks,” Sam said. “We painted them ourselves.”

“Very cool. If you have any questions, feel free to ask.”

“Will do,” Sam said.

They headed down the aisle. Sam reached out and took Kurt’s hand. He pulled back, but Sam held on tight and didn’t let go.

He stepped closer to Kurt and spoke very quietly. “The guy works in a comic book shop. He complimented us on our hoodies. He knows dam good and well that Billy and Teddy are a couple. Nerdy geeks are not like homophobic jocks. I’m pretty sure the dude figured out we were a couple as soon as he saw our hoodies.”

“Okay. It’s just a bit scary.”

“I don’t think any jocks ever come here.”

“You’re here.”

“I’m an aberration.”

“You’re adorable.” Kurt did his best to relax. He intertwined their fingers.

“This place is awesome.”

“I knew you’d think so.” He squeezed Sam’s hand.

They made their way through the store. Sam stopped every few feet to look at stuff. Once they had looked at everything, Sam went back to one of the displays.

“Would you learn to play a game with me?”

“Sure.”

“It’s a complicated game. I won’t lie. It takes time to learn to play it well. It can be kind of frustrating
at first.”

“Most things are kind of frustrating until you get decent at them.”

“That’s true. So, will you?”

“I already said that I would.”

“Okay. Then I know what I want to get.” He stepped a little closer to the display. “You’ll need a deck box.” Sam pointed at what he was referring to.

“Alright.” Kurt picked up one he liked.

Sam picked up a package of cards and some booster packs. They walked back through one of the aisles and Sam picked up a couple of comics.

“Wait,” Kurt said. “Are those cards for me?”

“Well, the one package is. You have to have a starter deck.”

“You don’t need to use your birthday present to get them. I can get them myself. The gift certificate was for you to get stuff for yourself.”

“Well, this is for me because I really want to play again and I don’t have anyone to play with here. So, by buying this starter pack for you, I get to play again.”

“Nice try, but no. Let me have the starter pack and you pick out things you want for yourself. I want to do things with you that you enjoy and if you like playing this game, then I’ll get a set of cards so I can play with you.”

Sam leaned in and spoke directly into Kurt’s ear. “You have no idea how much I want to kiss you.”

“Later,” Kurt said quietly, but he couldn’t contain his grin. I have the cutest boyfriend ever.

Sam took Kurt’s hand again and started to look around some more. He picked up several other comics in the older comics section and a graphic novel. “Okay. I’m ready.”

“We can stay as long as you’d like. I’m not in a hurry. I brought you here to have fun.”

“And I did. Now that I know this is here, I can come back.”

“Okay.”

They got in line and bought their stuff and headed back out to the Navigator.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

“How about we go to Goodwill for a little bit and see if we find anything we can use to make the costumes.”

“I’m not pressuring you am I? You’re not doing this because you think I will like you less if you don’t, are you?”
“No. I like making costumes and dressing up. I’ve just never had a good occasion for it except for Glee or Halloween. And once I started high school, Halloween hasn’t been as much fun since I’m too old to go trick-or-treating.”

“As long as you’re sure. How much I like you isn’t dependent on you deciding that you like superheroes.”

“I know. But you can learn about what I like when we make the costumes together. You’re a really good artist, but sewing is a form of art too.”

“You’re right. I have zero sewing skills and learning with you will be fun.”

Kurt pulled into a parking spot. “Let’s go see what they’ve got.”

They sat on the edge of the bed and they both flopped back.

“That was totally not what I was looking for when we went, but it was a great find. A solid wood table that’s five feet long and narrow enough to be a desk. It’s perfect. And it was $40. I looked online at desks after you moved in. Even ones that weren’t real wood were like $75-100. And they were only big enough for one person. And dining tables are too wide for the space.”

“It will be great for studying. I’ve tried sitting at your vanity, but there just isn’t enough room on it and it’s hard to stay awake sitting in the bed when I get started so late every evening. This will really help. You can use it for sewing projects and I can use it for art projects too since it’s so long.”

“We’ll just borrow some chairs from the dining room until we find some we like. We’ll bring them up after dinner. We don’t need all of them around the table unless we have extra people over. I don’t need that chair that was in the corner by the shelf. We can just put it in the family room for now.”

“Sounds good. Alright, I’ve caught my breath. What’s next on the agenda?”

“I think you get to read and I’m going to read the rules to the card game.”

“Okay. But first, there was the matter of the kissing that I didn’t get to do in the store.”

“Well, by all means, let’s get to that first,” Kurt laughed and rolled to face Sam, who turned on his side as well.

They spent several minutes kissing.

“Let’s sit up. This is not very comfortable, half on the bed, half off. Let’s rearrange. Grab your bag from the comic shop and we’ll read.” Kurt got up and grabbed the card pack and opened it and took the directions out. “You weren’t kidding when you said complicated. I may have to read these several times.”

“I’ll help you when we play the first few times. I don’t just want to beat you. I want to play with you. It’s a fun strategy game. I mean of course I want to win, but not because I know how to play and you don’t.”

“I get it.” Kurt slipped his shoes off and scooted back in the bed and pushed the pillows so he could read comfortably.

Sam pulled out a comic and started to read as well.
About 15 minutes later, there was a knock at the door. Kurt got up and opened it.

“Rachel?”

“Can I talk to you?”

“Sure.” He looked back at Sam. “I’ll be back.” He shut the door behind them. He led her down to the family room. He sat down on the couch.

“When I came to apologize before you didn’t seem pleased.” She followed him and sat on the other end.

“Well, you apologized for the stalking that led to the article and I told you that you should apologize to Sam for that, not me.”

“And I did that the next day at school. But you’re angry at me and I’m not sure why. I told you that I’m working through my issues with the way I’ve behaved in Glee Club. I’ve still been seeing the therapist. She told me that if I couldn’t figure out why you were angry that I should ask you.”

“Do you remember the first thing you said when I announced that I was transferring?”

“No.”

“I do. You said, ‘Does that mean you’ll be competing against us at Sectionals?’ You made it about you. I know that you had been the one to try to rally the guys to look out for me, but then when I was leaving to protect myself, your response was not one of caring about my safety, but how I might become a member of the enemy team and possibly prevent you from winning. At least that’s how I felt.”

“Oh.”

“Then you flipped back into ‘let’s be friends mode’. You were nice to me at Sectionals. We went out for coffee and Blaine told you how the football team could still play. You knew I had a crush on him. Do you remember when we had the sleepover?”

“Of course.”

“You knew how devastated I was when he chose to serenade Jeremiah.”

“I remember.”

“Then you had a party and got drunk and so did Blaine. The two of you French kissed right in front of me. No one else French kissed someone they weren’t dating. And then you took him and made him your new duet partner. And then you called him and asked him out on a date. A date, Rachel. You invited the guy that you knew I had a crush on out on a date. Maybe you were just trying to make Finn jealous since he was with Quinn. I don’t know, but it hurt. For once, just once there was a guy that MIGHT have liked me. He was the first out gay teen I had met. The first guy that I might have had a chance with, even if it was small and you stepped in and asked him out. Do you remember what you said to me that day we were sitting in the Lima Bean waiting for him?”

“No.”

“I was trying to be kind and told you that I had a bad feeling about it and how it was going to end badly for me either way and your response was ‘Who cares about you? I might of get a boyfriend that can keep up with me vocally and give me slightly Eurasian looking children.’ That was a low
blow. I was alone at a school 90 minutes from home. The object of my crush didn’t like me back and had turned me down, but then agreed to go on a date with you. It was all about you. And that was all you cared about. You made that abundantly clear. You could date any of the 400 or so guys at McKinley. You could have picked any of the other 14 Warblers to ask out on a date, but you chose to ask the guy that you knew I had a crush on out on a date.”

“I didn’t think about it that way.”

“Obviously. It’s the same situation every time, Rachel. You didn’t think how it would make Finn feel for you to cheat with Puck. Puck of all people? The guy who slept with Finn’s girlfriend and got her pregnant? How do you think that made Puck feel? You used him. Every situation that has gotten people angry with you is because you’ve only thought of yourself. It just so happens that a few of those times directly affected me. But I get enough bullying from people who despise me for me to be willing to put up with people who are supposedly my friends doing such hurtful things to me.”

She just sat there.

“Look, I’m figuring that your attempt to date Blaine was a way to make Finn jealous. That duet you did with Blaine at your party was the type of song you would have sung with Finn typically. And I’m figuring the asking Sam to Prom was some way to try to instigate some type of jealousy reaction from Quinn to get her to think about leaving Finn to be with Sam again since you thought she was cheating on Finn. But all of these things you do, you don’t think about how they affect other people. More than anything that’s why people don’t like you. You have no loyalty to anyone but yourself. You know we let you come back after you ditched us for Cabaret last year. You told us that you valued our friendship more than being a star. We welcomed you back, but you’ve done nothing to prove that statement. You sent Sunshine to a crack house. You did that specifically to keep her from taking what you consider to be your place in Glee. She could have helped New Directions win. If you valued being part of the group over being a star, you wouldn’t have scared her away.”

“You’re right.”

Kurt got a text. “Everyone’s here. We need to go upstairs and I need to get Sam to come down.”

“Okay.” Rachel got up to go up to the dining room.

Kurt went back up to their bedroom and picked up the instructions and sat back down to read them again. He got a text a couple of minutes later.

“Carole wants us to come down to the kitchen.”

“What for?”

“Let’s go find out. Maybe we’re having an early dinner.”

Kurt let Sam go down the stairs first. He turned to go into the kitchen, but no one was in there.

“Carole?”

“In here, Sam.” He heard her say from the dining room. He walked across the kitchen and turned to go into the dining room and he saw all of the Glee Club in the dining room and heard “Surprise!”
Kurt came right up behind him and wrapped his arm around Sam’s waist. “Happy birthday!”

Sam leaned over and said, “You’re sneaky.”

“Mmm hmm.”

Everyone started to sing. When they finished, Carole went into the kitchen and brought a cake in and lit the candles. Sam blew them out and Carole cut the cake and started sitting the slices on the table.

“Thank you guys. You definitely surprised me.”

Finn spoke up, “The movie’s all set up downstairs. Mom’s ordering pizza for after the movie.”

Everyone enjoyed the cake and headed downstairs.

“The movie is a gift from all of us,” Finn said. “I’m pretty sure you’ll like it.”

“What is it?”

Kurt answered, *Tron Legacy*.

“Awesome. Let’s start it.”

Sam sat in the armchair and patted his lap. Kurt looked at him like he was nuts. Sam pouted and batted his eyes. Kurt rolled his eyes and turned the lights off. He walked behind the couch and chair and leaned over the chair to whisper in Sam’s ear.

“Are you sure?”

“I’m certain. We can both fit. Sit with me, please.”

Kurt went around the side of the chair and sat down with Sam. It took them a few minutes, but they got comfortable. Sam kissed Kurt’s neck gently. “I’m not ashamed. I love you. And they’re supposed to be our friends. They came here to our house. If they didn’t want to see us together, then they shouldn’t have come.”

Kurt nodded. He relaxed into Sam’s side and ran his fingers along Sam’s wrist under the edge of his hoodie. Not long after that, Sam managed to slip his other hand up under the edge of Kurt’s hoodie and put it on Kurt’s abdomen and caressed his skin while they watched.

A little over two hours later, the movie ended. Finn got up to go see if the pizzas had come. Puck went with him. A few minutes later, they came back down the stairs. Finn was carrying several pizza boxes, a bag of breadsticks, and a stack of paper plates and napkins. He put the pizza boxes down and handed the breadstick bag to Rachel since she didn’t eat pizza anymore. Puck put the cartons of drinks on the floor next to the table.

Kurt got off Sam’s lap and grabbed a couple of slices of pizza and put them on a plate and handed them to Sam and then got a couple for himself. He sat on the floor between Sam’s legs so they could eat more easily.

“Thanks for the movie, guys. I really liked it.”

“It was cool,” Artie said.

Finn had already downed a couple of slices of pizza, but stopped to say something. “Um, we want to tell both of you that we’re fine with you two being together.”
Mercedes cut in, “Yeah. We were really wrong to act the way we did. I know I already apologized in person, but I want everyone to know that I’m really sorry for the way I behaved. You both deserve to be happy and if you’re happy together, that’s what matters. We’re going to be here for you.”

Surprisingly, Rachel was the next to speak. “I’m sure you’re surprised that I’m even here. I’m surprised that I’m here. But my dads spoke to Burt and Carole and convinced them to let me come. I told them that I wanted to apologize. I’m really sorry for what I did. I’m seeing someone new and she’s helping me a lot. She’s a big proponent of personal responsibility, mostly meaning she doesn’t listen to me whine or act like a diva. She’s helping me to see how childish I’ve been. I can’t guarantee I can change quickly, but I’m working on it. I’ve realized that people give in to me because I’m really annoying if they don’t. I’m not accustomed to hearing ‘no’. But my new therapist pointed out that as a performer, I’ll hear ‘no’ more often than ‘yes’ and I need to get used to it. I’m not sure how to do that yet, but I’m working on it.”

Kurt responded, “Look, Rachel. Personally, what you’ve done to me will take time for me to move past because accusing me of being a cheater not the only thing that happened between the two of us.”

He could tell that she was thinking about what they had just talked about, she nodded. “I know.”

“But I think as a group what people want is for you to be PART of the group. We all have to learn to work with the cards we were dealt. It just so happens that you have two very doting parents who give you your way all the time. It happens, especially in families where the parents really wanted a kid and had to work hard to have one. But you’re not the only child in this weird pseudo-family Glee Club. There are 12 of you, not counting me because I’m not there anymore. It takes a lot of work to mesh 12 voices, 12 personalities, and different skill levels. But without all 12 people, you know you can’t compete. You’ve got to learn to be a team player, Rachel. That’s all anyone in the group really wants, at least from my perspective”

Santana spoke up. “You just need to stop acting like Glee Club exists so you can be the star. The honest truth is that Mercedes is better than you. I’m better than you. Tina is better than you. Kurt is better than you. Quinn is better than you. Lauren is better than you. Brittany is better than you. You are better than all of us. The question comes down to when is each of us better in a specific situation. We all have strengths. You are not the best at every style of music, dancing, and performing. If we want to be the best group, we have to do that by letting each of us do what we do best. If you come down off your high horse, you’ll find that your life is actually easier. People won’t fight you tooth and nail if you only assert yourself when you are actually the best for something.”

“I’ll work on it,” Rachel said.

“I accepted your apology the other day, Rachel. You know that,” Sam said. “But I’m not sure that I can forgive you yet, but I accept the fact that you’re sorry about what you did.”

She nodded.

“Are you coming back to McKinley next year, Kurt?” Tina asked.

“Yeah. I’m just finishing out the semester at Dalton. I won’t be at school much though because Sam and I are taking most of our classes at OSU Lima.”

Tina spoke again, “But you’ll be in Glee right?”

“Yes. We’ll both be in Glee. It’s going to be a regular class next year. It will meet first period. So, I
guess if we need extra rehearsals, they’ll be before school. Sorry about that. We’re not going to be at school in the afternoons.”

“We’ll live,” Santana said. “But I don’t think we’ll need it with Glee being a real class. We can’t just sit around and goof off. We’ll get grades for doing something. So, I’m imagining that Rachel’s penchant for singing solos every class won’t be an option.”

“Wait,” Puck said. “If you’re only going to be at McKinley in the morning, does that mean you’re quitting football?”

“Yeah. The guys on the team don’t want me in the locker room, new shower privacy partitions or not. I know it seems like giving in to the bullying, but I honestly just don’t want to deal with it. If I stay out of the locker room, hopefully they’ll just mind their own business when we are at school.”

“Well that sucks. It would be better if you stayed on the team and Kurt rejoined. Our kicker isn’t any good.” Puck said. “I hate that those losers will still get to control things.”

Kurt said, “Unfortunately for us, people like that control a lot of things – like who can and can’t get married. In Ohio, sexual orientation isn’t a protected class. People get fired just for being gay. I’ve seen it happen. It sucks, but it’s true. Mike and Tina could rent an apartment together once they’re both 18 with no problems, but people can turn me and Sam down as potential renters just because we’re a gay couple. People can choose not to hire us just because we’re gay. Lots of things aren’t fair and the only way they ever will be is if people like you guys vote to make them fair. We are a minority. We will never have equal rights as long as we’re the only ones voting for them.”

“I never really thought about it like that,” Tina said. “But you’re right. When people in our generation are old enough to vote and have a voice, we have to be the ones to change it for other people.”

Everyone went back to eating for a while. People started talking again after a while, but mostly in smaller groups. But then the topic came around to Prom.

“You’re going to sing with us at Prom, right?” Mercedes asked.

“Sing with you?” Kurt asked.

“Yeah, we’re all going together. We’re all wearing black and white with red accents. We’re going to rehearse next Saturday afternoon before Prom. Please say ‘yes’,” Tina pleaded.

“All right. If there are group pieces that I already know the words to that my voice would work well in, then I’ll join in.”

“Yay!” Brittany said. “I didn’t know if you were coming.”

“Sam asked me, so yes.”

By this point, all the pizza was pretty much gone. “Thanks for coming, everyone. I hate to be the spoilsport since it’s my party, but I still have a lot of homework to get done since Kurt already has something planned for tomorrow, I can’t do it then.”

“It’s alright,” Quinn said. “We knew it wasn’t an all evening event.”

Finn picked up the trash and Kurt grabbed the leftover drinks. Puck carried Artie back upstairs and out to his truck. Sam grabbed Artie’s wheel chair and put it in the back of Puck’s truck. Everyone else followed them out. Kurt stood with Sam in the driveway and waved as people drove off.
This is the stack of stuff I need help with still.”

“Alright, let’s tackle it. Once we’ve gotten through it you can send everything to your teachers and we can shower and go to bed. Get it organized in the order you want to do it and I’ll be right back up. I’m going to put a load of laundry in.”

Kurt knocked on his parents’ bedroom door after he put the first load in the washer. He thanked them for hosting Sam’s surprise birthday party and talked to them about his ideas for his summer plans. He went right back upstairs and got busy helping Sam get his work done as quickly as possible.

While Sam was doing the Algebra problem set, Kurt went back to reading the rules for his card game. They were incredibly detailed and he did his best to focus on the rules and he studied the cards in his starter deck. As soon as Sam finished, Kurt took his worksheets and scanned them downstairs and Sam sent them in. They finished everything up a little later than Kurt had hoped, but they were in bed by 11:00.

“How early are we leaving?”

“Really early – at 6:30.”

“Why so early?”

“Let’s just sleep so I’m not too tired to drive in the morning.” Kurt kissed him and rolled over so Sam could scoot up behind him.

They pulled up to the Cracker Barrel in Findlay at 7:00am.

“I need you to trust me, okay?”

“Alright. You know I trust you, but you’re kind of freaking me out.”

“I know, but I really can’t say anything other than I need you to stay calm and trust me.”

Sam nodded, but looked confused and concerned. He got out and followed Kurt inside. Kurt asked for a table along the far wall near the back corner. They sat down at a table and Kurt indicated for Sam to sit to the inside and Kurt sat next to him. They only had to wait about 10 minutes for the first member of their party to arrive. Sam spoke quietly when he saw him.

“You invited Karofsky?”

“Remember. Trust me and be calm.”

The hostess let David walk the rest of the way to the table on his own once he indicated that he had found who he was looking for. He sat down opposite Kurt.

“I know this whole thing is kind of weird and cryptic, but I wanted to talk to you away from Lima in a place where no jocks would ever see us together.”

“It’s fine,” David said. “There was a big party last night and pretty much everyone got smashed. They’re all sleeping it off this morning. Why did you want to see me?”

“I can’t continue to keep what happened from Sam. He will never tell anyone. All of this needs to
make sense to him. He knows what it’s like to have people find out things he wasn’t ready for people to know."

“You’ll tell me why I’m here once you tell him, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Fine.”

Kurt leaned into Sam and blocked his mouth from view and spoke directly into Sam’s ear. “You were right. He threatened to kill me because I found out that he’s gay. His mother will send him to conversion camp if she finds out, but Santana figured it out too and is blackmailing him.”

“I got it,” Sam answered.

“Alright. We’re good?” Kurt asked.

“Yeah,” Sam said.

“He figured 90% of it out on his own, but I’ve never corroborated what he figured out. Or answered his questions. He was in the locker room when you came back and Azimio told you I had withdrawn from McKinley.”

“Oh. I obviously thought the locker room was empty when Z left.”

Sam just nodded. “I will keep what I know to myself, just like I have the last five months.”

David nodded.

The waitress approached and each of them placed their order. Kurt placed an additional order, but gave no explanation.

“I asked you to come here because I’m going to give you an address that you need to bury deep in your phone somewhere that no one but you can find. It’s Carole’s aunt Eunice who lives on a farm near Zanesville. The other numbers are our cell phone numbers – mine, Sam’s, my dad’s, and Carole’s. I want you to pack a bag and keep it ready in your truck under the seat or something. Just go to Goodwill if you have to. Buy a week’s worth of clothes and keep them with you. If Santana or anyone else decides to say anything, I want you to get in your truck and drive to this address. Eunice already knows that there’s a possibility of a teenager showing up unannounced.”

“Why are you doing this? I’ve never been anything but awful to you.”

“Because no matter how awful you’ve been, you don’t deserve to end up where your mother would send you. Once you turn 18, you can choose to go to that address and just live there and finish school if you want. In exchange for living there, you’ll be required to work on her farm as a farm hand, taking care of horses and whatnot. But you would be able finish out high school with no one knowing where you are or your secret.”

David just sat there stunned.

“If you don’t actually own your truck, one of us will drive you out to Zanesville and leave you there. No questions asked. Just text one of us and we’ll pick you up wherever you are and take you there.”

“My truck is in my dad’s name.”

“Think of where to bury this information in your phone and put it there.”
David took his phone out and created a document and put the information in his phone. Kurt took the slip of paper back and put it in his pocket.

“I enrolled at OSU Lima. I’m taking a math class and a physics class, but they’re both 5-credit courses, so I don’t have time to take anything else really. I’ll take English and Government at school in the afternoons. I already have enough credits not to need any other classes. I’ll have study hall right after lunch so that I don’t have to show up until 1:00 or whatever. My plan is to be back at McKinley by lunch. The study halls after lunch are just a buffer in case I have to stay for a group project or something. If we run into each other on the OSU Lima campus, I won’t bother you two, I swear.”

“I know. You’re trying to hang on for one more year, just like me. We’ll just keep walking and pretend to not know each other. That way no one will ever see us interact. Sam and I are taking four classes, so we may very well be on campus at the same time since we’ll get there around 10:00 and you will probably still be there.”

David spoke again. “I want you to know that I am really sorry. Fear does insane things to people.”

“I know you’re sorry, David and I accept your apology. I’m not sure if or when I can forgive you, but you have made sincere changes and I realize that those have happened under duress. But all I can hope is that somewhere inside, you really do want to change and that you’re doing some of this for yourself.”

“I am. I don’t want to be that person anymore. I’m still terrified though. But I’m more afraid of being found out than I am of looking like a softie to the rest of the team. I’m going with the ‘I want to get scouted for college’ line with the jocks who have asked me why I’ve become such a wuss. I told each one of them that has bullied me for not bullying anyone to shut the fuck up. My ticket out of Lima is either playing college football or hockey. And either way, that involves me being straight and not getting expelled for bullying people. So, I play Santana’s game for now. And I tell the jocks to leave me alone.”

“Here’s an idea. It’s strange I know, but just think about it. Apply to work at a summer camp somewhere. Apply to every camp you can find. Go away for the summer. Make some money. The less time you spend in town, the less the jocks can try to mess with you.”

“Interesting idea. I’ll look into the camp idea. Another positive is that I wouldn’t possibly get forced to help my mom at the camp she’ll be working at.”

Kurt said, “I can’t talk about that. It makes me feel like throwing up.”

“So, how long have you two actually been going out? You were obviously seeing each other on the DL, but then JBI had to go and pull that shit with The Muckraker.”

Sam answered, “Two months. I wasn’t going to stay in the closet though, so his stupidity just moved the date forward. I was going to tell everyone back two months ago, but due to some issues, I decided to wait. I was just going to wait until the No Bullying policy went into effect and tell the Gleeks. I’m not in the position you’re in. My family has known for ages and they’re fine with it.”

“Lucky you.”

“I know.”

The fourth member of their party showed up and sat down next to David.

“Someone please tell me why the hell I drove 30 minutes on a Sunday morning to eat breakfast with
the three of you.”

“You can’t threaten David anymore, Santana.” Kurt looked at David. “Tell her.”

He took a deep breath and let it out. He leaned close to her and spoke very quietly. “If you go to my parents, my mother will send me to conversion camp this summer. She volunteers for one.”

“Oh, God. I knew your mom was super religious, but I had no idea. I won’t say a word. I swear. I wouldn’t wish that on my worst enemy.”

Kurt saw the waitress approaching and put his hand up to get them to stop talking. “Waitress.”

They waited for her to name off the breakfasts and indicated by raising their hands to indicate whose plate it was. She asked if they needed anything and they all said, “No, thank you.”

“Is that what this secret meeting is about?” Santana took a bite of her food. “This is good. Thanks.”

Kurt nodded. Everyone else started to eat as well.

“It’s about how David is done hassling me. It’s over. He wants to get a sports scholarship and he wants to stay at McKinley, so he’s turned over a new leaf that doesn’t require you to blackmail him anymore.”

“Well, that takes a lot of the fun out of it. I wanted Kurt back and you were keeping him away. But I really had no idea that’s what your mom would do. I figured she might throw you out and you’d have to go live with some relative and change schools. But you were so awful to everyone, it seemed like a fair punishment.”

“The rest of her relatives and quite a few of my dad’s wouldn’t let me step foot inside their houses if they knew. Kurt gave me some contacts and I think I’ll be okay, but I need to know we have an agreement based on trust, not threats. I can continue to be your beard, but only if this is a mutually agreeable decision – not you forcing me. I’m not planning on coming out until – maybe after college. Being gay and a football player or a hockey player will not work out for me. So, I just need to get used to being either in a fake relationship or single. It’s actually easier for me to stay in a fake relationship. Honestly, you’re the perfect beard since you’ve gone out with so many of the football players, they just assume that we’re sleeping together and it saves me a lot of hassle of explaining why I don’t have a girlfriend.”

“I get it.”

“I’ll only be at school for last period and for sports practices next year. So, you can have your whole day free of having to pretend. It will just be afterschool. We can go out on public dates like every other week or something, like to Breadstix or the movies.”

“That could work.”

“My short term goal is to go to college on a sports scholarship. Study something useful. Get a job doing whatever I can do to pay my bills when I graduate. I have no long-term plan to play sports. So, I guess at that point, I will consider coming out. Five years.”

“I really love Britt, which you all know, and she’s willing, but I’m not ready – so maybe after high school for me. Once I’m out of Lima. I don’t know that college is what I want to do, but whatever it is, it’s not going to be in Lima. We can break up when we go our separate ways after high school.”

“So, this agreement is solid? Santana will stop blackmailing David. You two will fake date each
other willingly until some future point in time when you decide to break up amicably. David will not bother me or Sam at all. And as far as I’m concerned, David is free to explain to the jocks that hassle him that the agreement that allowed him to return to McKinley last fall included him being nice to me or ignoring me. Whatever works to protect him from their wrath or suspecting anything.”

“Fine with me,” Santana said. “As long as it includes the fact that the three of you won’t talk about me being bisexual or a lesbian to anyone.”

“Sam and I won’t say anything about any of this to anyone, except to corroborate David’s story that he has to be nice to me or ignore me if someone asks, whichever option he chooses.”

David nodded. “I’ve told them that I have to leave you alone, so we’ll go with the ‘I can’t interact with you’ answer. I already feel less stressed. I’ve been terrified out of my mind.” He turned and looked at Santana. “We can find something we can do that we both can tolerate for our dates.”

“Sure,” Santana shrugged.

Kurt put his hand up again and looked behind them. “Waitress.”

The waitress came by to pick up their plates and asked if they wanted anything else. They all declined the offer. After she cleared the table, left their checks, and walked away, they all put money down on the table for a tip.

Kurt reiterated, “I’m just verifying before we get up from the table. We’re all good. No one is blackmailing anyone. We’re all keeping David and Santana’s issues private. If they come to a decision to call off their dating situation, they will do it amicably in private and move on. David will not talk to me or Sam publicly to protect his image of not wanting to be around gay guys and to fulfill the ‘requirement’ to leave me alone that he’s told the jocks about, but he will do nothing to either of us. We will not acknowledge his presence in public in Lima. If he has an emergency, he can use the contact information I gave him.”

“Agreed,” David said.

“Yeah. I’m fine with that,” Sam said.

“I’ll keep my end of the deal,” Santana said.

“I will as well,” Kurt added. “So, it’s settled. Let’s get going. You two can leave first if you want and we’ll wait 10 minutes before we go to the cashier.”

David and Santana got up and headed to the store area to pay for their meals.

“How did you find out? Did he just tell you? That seems highly unlikely.”

“If I tell you, you have to promise me in advance that you won’t do anything to him. I just set all of this up to create a permanent high school truce and to do what I could to keep him safe. If someone finds out his secret, his life, as he knows it, is over. You were already a ‘loser’ and a ‘homo lover’ or whatever because you’re in Glee and you defended me last fall. The jocks never considered you on ‘their’ side. You only played with them one season. David would be lucky to survive being outed without multiple broken bones or maybe worse. And I would very likely be targeted as well as the one who converted him like I’m some kind of vampire or werewolf.”

“They’re completely ignorant.”

“My point exactly. They will go after David with a vengeance and then after me. In their minds, he
would be the second jock I infected with my gayness. They will retaliate. I will tell you how I found out, but you have to promise me to let it go. Or you can decide you just don’t want to know.”

Sam didn’t say anything right away.

“You can think about it.”

They got up, paid their bills, and left.

Half an hour later, they pulled into the Maumee Bay State Park. Kurt parked and pulled out his small messenger bag that he had packed with snacks and water and put it on. They headed out to walk along the edge of Lake Eerie. Once they got away from the parking lot area, Sam took Kurt’s hand and interlaced their fingers.

“It’s really beautiful here,” Sam said.

“It is. I’ve never been here before. I started doing research on things we could do and see that were fairly close to Lima. There are several beach areas, an indoor and outdoor pool, a bunch of hiking trails, an inland lake where they rent canoes and stuff, and we can camp here. Would you like to come this summer and stay for a few days?”

“That would be really cool. Do you have a tent and stuff?”

“We do. I checked the prices and it’s really affordable. They have toilets and showers in the camping area, so it’s not totally wilderness camping.”

“Do we get to swim in the pools if we pay to camp?”

“Yes.”

“Sounds fun.”

“Then we’ll check what dates are available and reserve a spot.”

They walked for another 10 minutes or so in silence.

“I’ve decided that I want to know.”

“Alright. But you can’t retaliate in any way. That will mess up everything that I’ve worked for.”

“Oh. I understand.”

“Last fall, after I had gone to spy on the Warblers, Karofsky knocked my phone out of my hand and sent it flying across the hall into the wall. When I had talked to Blaine, he told me about how he regretted letting the bullies chase him away his previous school. He said that bullying was just ignorance. He suggested that I stand up for myself. I knew it was stupid, but honestly Finn was unhappy me about having to defend me. He had this undertone to the way he talked that I brought it on myself, that I shouldn’t need other people to defend me because I should just stop being such a nuisance to the people who were harassing me. You know how he was. Combine those things with the fact that Karofsky had more than likely just destroyed my fairly new iPhone – I was livid. Blaine had just texted me the word ‘courage’, and not for the first time that day. And in all honesty, I had never actually tried defending myself with good reason. But in my anger, it seemed like a good idea at the time. Anyway, I took off after Karofsky and followed him into the locker room. He informed
me of the location of the girls’ locker room and it just set me off. I am NOT a girl. I lit into him with words. I called him a ‘scared little boy’ and insulted his physique and his looks. Not my finest hour.”

“Yeah. That was pretty dumb.”

“I know, but God was I mad. I was covered in bruises and I was sick of being peaceful and turning the other cheek only to have it slammed into a locker too. I told him to go ahead and beat me up. But that he couldn’t punch the gay out of me any more than I could punch the ignoramus out of him or something like that. Again, not my finest moment.”

“And?”

“And he lunged at me and instead of punching me, he grabbed me and he kissed me.”

“He WHAT?”

“You heard me. He outed himself in a big way. He tried to kiss me a second time and I shoved him back and he slammed the locker room locker and stormed out. I stood there in shock. Later that day, I told Blaine. I didn’t do it to out Karofsky. I was so scared that I couldn’t keep it in, so I told someone who didn’t know him.”

“Okay.”

“So, Blaine came to McKinley and offered to help me talk to Karofsky, but instead he nearly outed him on the outdoor stairwell. After that, the bullying increased dramatically. Blaine approaching him publicly and the fact that I had told someone scared Karofsky to death and his method of dealing with it was to terrify me and threaten to kill me if I told anyone else.”

“That was about the time that Mike and Artie confronted him, I’m assuming – when I clocked him for knocking Artie out of his wheelchair.”

“Yeah. But now you see why I tried to explain that standing up to him in my defense wasn’t going to do any good. He had to keep the terror up on his end or I might lose my resolve to keep quiet. Knowing what I know now I can understand why he acted the way he did. If I had thought of another way to approach him without an outsider with me, in PRIVATE somehow, the whole escalation could have stopped. I would have told him that I would help him get away if his parents found out. I would have never outed him.”

“But he had been so awful to you that he assumed you would be interested in revenge.”

“Yeah. Revenge or rape. I was terrified.”

“I won’t do anything to him because you asked me not to, but what he did to you was so incredibly wrong.”

“I know. But what I participated in with Blaine was wrong too. I should have just faked sick or something for a few days and thought about what to do. Running to an outsider who was a teenager was a stupid idea.”

“But he had hurt you so many times, you had no reason to believe that once he had kissed you against your will that he wouldn’t do more than grab you and kiss you the next time.”

“I know.” Tears were streaming down Kurt’s cheeks. “But it’s all in the past now. It’s hard to separate out how the bad things influenced the good things. I have no way of knowing if you would have ever told me how you felt if I had stayed at McKinley. If you hadn’t told me what had
happened to your family, you might be heading to Kentucky at the end of the school year. Maybe I was supposed to be at Dalton. There’s just no way to know. It’s over. It happened. I’m okay. And you’re with me. I’ve never had a best friend. I mistakenly thought that Blaine was, but he just liked my attention. He didn’t really care about me. But you do, right? I love you so much, but honestly it’s really scary. I’ve never let anyone close to me like I have you.”

“Yes, I really care about you. Stop for a minute. Look at me.”

Kurt stopped walking and turned to face him.

“You’re my best friend too. No one knows as much about me as you do besides my parents and you know things that even they don’t know. I love you, Kurt. And I want to be with you. I’ll do my best to never hurt you.”

Kurt nodded. “I believe you.” He looked around and didn’t see anyone close by. He wrapped his arms around Sam and hugged him and just held on tight.

Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt as well. “We have each other now.”

Kurt nodded. “Yeah, we do.” He stepped back and took Sam’s hand again and they continued on their walk.

“So, we’re leaving the park and we’ve only been here a couple of hours?” Sam was confused.

“I’m taking you somewhere else.”

“Okay.”

“Don’t worry. It’s free.”

“I’m not worried. You told me you weren’t going to do a bunch of expensive stuff. I just don’t even know what to guess that we might be doing next. I already liked what we were doing.”

“No need to guess. It’s a surprise.”

“You like to surprise me.”

“You’re fun to surprise.” Kurt reached over and took his hand. It didn’t take too long for them to reach their destination. “We’re here,” Kurt said as he turned into the museum parking lot.

“An art museum. It’s free?”

“It is. They have special exhibits that you have to buy tickets for, but the main collection of artwork is free to visit.”

“Awesome. Let’s go check it out.”

Sam closed his door and put his seatbelt on. “So, that was super amazingly awesome!” Sam had a huge smile on his face.

“It was. So, what do you think of my idea? I already talked to Dad about it since I had told him that I would work full time.” Kurt put his seat belt on and pulled out of the parking spot and headed back
toward Lima.

“I really don’t like working at the gas station, so I’d be glad to switch to working at the shop with you. He is aware that I know nothing about fixing cars, right?”

“Yeah. I’ll have to train you to do some things and you can run the front register and stuff. He already knows that I can’t work as many hours next school year as I did before I went to Dalton. He knows that the college classes will take up a lot of time.”

“So, we’d each go to camp here in Toledo during the day and then work in the shop in the late afternoon and evening?”

“So, we could still work 20 hours a week during the summer during the camps, full time afterwards, and then in the fall we’d drop down to 15.”

“That seems reasonable. I can cover my insurance, my phone, and gas and still have some money left for things I want to do and save some money on 15-20 hours a week.”

“I just feel like going to the camps would help us see if the fields we think we want to study are really what we want to do. Plus, they would be good additions to our CVs to get into college I think.”

“I know you had asked me about college and I said I had always thought about going to college in Tennessee, but I had been doing so poorly this year and I do so poorly on standardized tests that it had gotten to where I thought there’d be no way I’d ever get into college. But now, I think maybe I can do it.”

“You’re smart. You can do it, but only if it turns out to be what you want to do. You could go to a vocational school and learn a trade if you don’t like college. Those jobs pay well too.”

“I think once we get started this fall, I’ll know. Applications for early admission won’t be due for a couple of months after school starts, and then a couple of months after that for regular admission applications.”

“Over the summer, we can visit college campuses too, after we find some that seem like they might be a good fit.”

They talked until Kurt pulled into a small parking lot in a small town that Sam didn’t see the name of. They stopped at secondhand stores on the way back to Lima. At the third place they stopped, they found a really nice black suit that fit Sam with the exception of the pants being a little too big around the waist. And Kurt found a tuxedo jacket that fit him. After they bought them, they headed home.
Chapter 13

“Well, now we have what we need for Prom and two chairs for our work table. It’s been a good treasure hunting day.”

“And all for under $25. Definitely a bargain.”

“When we get home, you can slip the pants on and I’ll mark them to take them up tonight. You can drop the suit and the tux jacket off at the cleaners after school tomorrow, if you put them in your truck tonight. The cleaners won’t be open as early as I will be leaving.”

“Sure.”

“I have some vests that will look good with the suit. You can look through them and see which ones you like and will fit. I also have plenty of ties.”

“What are you going to wear with that tux jacket? Do you have tux pants at home already?”

“No, but I have an idea. I’ll show you when we get home.”

Kurt came out of the closet wearing black leggings under his utility kilt with a pleated tux shirt and the tux jacket, a black bow tie with silver accents, and his knee-high black leather boots.

“What do you think?”

Sam looked up from his comic book. “You look hot. Very sexy.”

“So, you’d go with me if wore this?”

“Sure.”

“The jacket needs different buttons. Silver ones to go with the silver pieces on the straps and buckles on the kilt and the silver in the bow tie.”

“That would look good.”

“I’ll measure the button diameter because I’ll have to get the buttons in Westerville and change them when I get back on Friday. Maybe a chain between the two buttons on the back. I’ll take my kilt with me and see what I can find that looks good with it. I mean if you’re sure you’re okay with me wearing it.”

“I like your unusual clothes. I told you that a long time ago. Why are you sounding like you think I wouldn’t like it?”

“Because I’m sure that no one else will. Well, Tina probably will. She likes unusual stuff too.”

“Hey, it’s your outfit that you’re wearing. You should enjoy wearing what you like.”

“Alright. Put the suit pants on while I get undressed so I can take them up around the waist. Then you can put the suit jacket on and I’ll set the buttons in a little bit to make it narrower through the
waist since you're slim.”

“Try them back on and let’s see how they fit now. Good… Turn… They look good. Put the jacket on so I can see how much to set the buttons over.”

Sam stood up straight and Kurt marked the jacket. He slipped it off and gave it back to Kurt who got to work on moving the buttons over. Sam sat down on the side of the bed and started reading his comic book again. A few minutes later, Kurt had the jacket ready for him to put back on. Sam put the whole ensemble on.

“Look in the mirror. What do you think?”

“I think the suit fits well now and the red, gray, and black patterned tie looks good with the gray vest. But I think I need a hair cut to wear a suit and not look silly.”

“I can fix that. Do you want the haircut tonight or next weekend when I come back home?”

“I guess tonight. You’ll have to fix your jacket up when you get home Friday night. Saturday you have to work, and then we’re going to rehearse the music right after you get off.”

“Right. No time for haircuts next weekend. Take my tux jacket and your suit down to your truck and I’ll get out the haircutting tools.”

“Here are your papers.”

Kurt took the file folder from Mr. Adams and opened it to see his grades. He handed the file folder back and put the papers in his binder. “Thank you for your help with this. I went and talked to the headmaster and arranged to leave next Wednesday with the provision that I’ll return the following Monday afternoon and stay until Wednesday at lunch to tutor my clients during finals week. I’ll still do all of their sessions, but move them around a bit next week and the following week.”

“I see.”

“Is there anything else you want to ask me or go over? I’ll be in Wednesday morning to pick up my transfer papers and my transcript, but I won’t be here in the afternoon for my session.”

“You’ve done well here and you’ve worked hard in your classes. I wish you had been able to find a way to feel like you were accepted here.”

“I’m sure I could have. I’m just not willing to give up my individuality to do it. I’ve come to like who I am or at least who I’m trying to be. And I can understand your point of view of feeling the need to help me try to assimilate here and be part of the Dalton community, but I think the fact that I could go home and still be myself every weekend and that I’ve made a true friend back home pretty much eliminated the need to feel like I had to become someone I’m not just to be accepted. I once told my Glee teacher that there are more than four sides to me. I think I’m more like one of those 20-sided D&D dice I saw at the comic book store. I enjoy wearing eyeliner and mascara, corsets and skirts, but I also enjoy camping. I like all sorts of music. I own everything from conservative black dress shoes and suits to knee high bitch boots and leather pants and the corset I mentioned. I have bondage wear and top hats. I sew. I’m a mechanic. I cook and bake. I’m not easily definable. I’m just me. And that’s okay. I don’t have to be someone else. And in the end, I made three friends here who were okay with that.”
“Well, Kurt, I have to say that you have been one of my most interesting appointments all year.”

“Thank you. I’ll take that as a compliment.”

Mr. Adams laughed.

“I’ve learned a lot here. The academic program here is really fantastic. I’m glad I had a place to go.”

“Me too. You’re free to leave early.”

“Thank you.” Kurt grabbed his satchel and headed off to get ready for his tutoring session.

When Sam got home from work, he found Kurt in their room finishing up the silver touches on the tuxedo jacket. As soon as he finished, he put it on.

“What do you think?”

“It’s awesome. Those silver buttons look really cool. Did you decide against the chains?”

“I couldn’t find any in Westerville that were similar to the kilt. I can always add some later if I find the right type somewhere.”

“Well, I like it the way it is.”

“Thanks. Get started on your homework and I’ll go make our dinner. Come downstairs in about 15 minutes.”

“Okay.”

“Okay.”

“That’s it.” He dropped his history textbook on the top of the stack. “I stayed up late pretty much every night this week and worked on my schoolwork because I knew this weekend would be crazy. As soon as you get back from scanning those math worksheets, I can send everything in.”

Kurt took the sheets and scanned them and brought the laptop back and Sam sent all of his assignments to his teachers. Afterwards, he shut the laptop down and left it on the desk as well.

“Shower?”

“First I want to show you something. I don’t want to risk getting it wet, with my hair dripping on it or anything.” Sam got up and pulled a sketchbook off his shelf and sat back down at the desk and indicated for Kurt to sit next to him. He opened the sketchbook, but in a way that only he could see the pages. “Remember that some of these are from memory and so, they might not be that great.”

“Alright. I’m not going to judge your artwork.”

“I know that you believe me, but sometimes it feels like you’re waiting for someone to jump out and tell you that you’ve been punked – like maybe you’re just imagining things.”

“I’m not sure what you’re getting at.”

“Us. Me and you. Sometimes I feel like you’re in this daze where you don’t feel like anything you see is real. I’m not sure that this will help that, but I’m going to show you anyway.” Sam opened the
sketchpad and laid it flat on the table where Kurt could see. Sam watched him.

“That’s me when we sang at the beginning of the year.”

Sam turned the page.

“That’s me in the choir room the day you came to join Glee.”

Sam turned the page again.

“Me sitting at lunch.”

Sam turned the page again.

“Oh my. That one is much more detailed.”

“I managed to take a picture of you while you were performing.”

“I see. You did a good job on capturing the feeling of the song.”

He turned the page again.

“Me at sectionals in my Dalton Uniform. How many drawings of me do you have?”

“I’ve never counted. Quite a few.” Sam closed the sketchbook and put it back on the shelf.

“So, you’re showed them to me because?”

“Because I love you and I want you to see that this started a long time ago for me. Remember we were talking at the lake about not knowing how things might have changed the present if we had done something different in the past. Like if you had gone to someone else for help? This is what I think about sometimes. What if I had just been bold enough to tell you up front how gorgeous I thought you were? Well you know, after we’d been on a couple of dates.”

Kurt laughed.

“What if had just had the guts to walk right up to you after that song and ask you out? We could have been together for 8 months instead of two. You’re not the only person living with ‘what ifs’ from their past. And I just want you to see that this is totally real for me.”

“I know it is. No one would risk coming out as a joke. I appreciate you showing me your drawings though.” Kurt blushed.

Sam came back to the desk and pulled Kurt to standing and hugged him and held him close. “You are gorgeous. When you perform, this joy just radiates from your eyes. That’s the one thing that really, really sets you apart from everyone else in Glee. Your eyes are so expressive when you sing. It’s like seeing the real you without any of the masks you wear to defend yourself from the hurtful world around you.”

“Thank you.”

Sam pulled back and looked Kurt in the eyes. “And you’re like that around me. That’s one of the things I’ve noticed. When we’re alone, your eyes are like that all the time.”

“I’m not afraid of you. I trust you.”
“I know. It makes me feel like the most special person in the world.”

Kurt managed to make it back from work and get showered by 11:00. He, Sam, and Finn ate lunch together and headed to McKinley to rehearse for Prom in the gymnasium.

At the rehearsal, Rachel told everyone that Jesse was back in town and that he had apologized for what had happened the year before and that he was going to be her Prom date. Kurt found Mercedes’ news to be the best because Shane Tinsley, who had only attended McKinley since the beginning of the semester, had asked her to Prom, and she was really excited.

Kurt joined in on the songs he knew the words to, sometimes just adding a harmony line to the choruses. They ran through all of their numbers at least once. Afterwards, they all left to get ready for Prom.

Burt and Carole were sitting in the living room waiting to take some pictures of Kurt and Sam before they left for Prom. The two of them came down the stairs and stepped into the living room.

“You’re wearing a kilt?” Burt said.

“What? You don’t like it?”

“I’m not going to stop you from wearing it, but I gotta be honest. I think you’re just trying to stir the pot a little bit. I think you’re trying to get some attention.”

“Exactly. What’s the point in dressing up? That’s why the guys wear the tails and the top hats and the girls wear the hoop skirts.”

Sam stepped closer to Kurt and took his hand. “I think he looks hot and he’s my date, not yours, sir… Burt… whatever.”

Sam moved even closer and wrapped his arm around Kurt’s waist. Sam just stood there staring at Burt.

“Apologize,” Sam said resolutely.

“He’s right, Burt. You sat at the table and told Finn that if he didn’t like how Kurt was dressed that it was none of his business.”

“There’s a lot of bad people out there, worse than that Karofsky kid, and all they’re just looking for is a match to light under the fire of their hate. And of course I want you to be yourself, but I also want you to be practical.”

“I have done everything right. And Prom is about joy, not fear. So, I’m wearing this suit. I think it’s fantastic. Just because you don’t like it doesn’t mean that it isn’t fashionable,” Kurt said.

Kurt took his phone out and pulled up photos from some fashion shows that showed handsome muscular men modeling outfits with kilts on runways. He showed him a couple of websites with some good-looking, muscular, shirtless guys wearing kilts in the online store ads.

“I am not going to argue with you. You are the parent and I am 17. If you order me to change my clothes, I will. Otherwise, I’m going dressed like this because I like this outfit. Sam likes this outfit. I am showing no more skin than a nun, Dad. I have on long boxer briefs, long pants, socks, knee-high boots, a kilt that covers my knees when I’m standing still, a sleeveless undershirt, a long-sleeved shirt, and a tux jacket. I could take off two layers of clothes before I got to the point that some of those girls dresses will be as far as skin that would be visible. But you’d rather me go upstairs and put on a pair of dress slacks and a single short sleeved, button-up shirt and go like that than to go dressed like this, wouldn’t you?”

Burt put his head in his hands and took a deep breath before he looked up. “What I want is for you to be is safe. That outfit looks like a big middle finger being pointed at the people who bullied you. It feels like you’re baiting them to harass you tonight.”

“Nope, not trying to get them to harass me. I hope they ignore my presence entirely. I have no intention of interacting with any of them. Coach Sue will be escorting us in and out.”

Burt sighed again.

“Look, Dad. I know that you’re concerned. But as I said, unless you are ordering me to change into pants, I’m wearing this outfit. Please make up your mind because we’re supposed to be there soon. You know that Finn left 20 minutes ago to pick up Quinn.”

Carole stood up with her camera. “Stand over near the door. I want to take your picture.”

They moved and stood where she asked them to.

Sam saw how tense Kurt was and he whispered in his ear, “I love you.”

When he heard what Sam said, Kurt eyes brightened and his lips morphed from a posed smile to a real one and Carole managed to capture it. Once she took the photo, Kurt turned to Sam and kissed him.

“We’ll see you later,” Kurt said as he opened the door and ushered Sam outside. They got in the Navigator and drove to McKinley.

Coach Sue was standing outside the entrance to the gym. Kurt pulled up alongside where she was standing. She opened the back door on the passenger side and got in and rode with them to a parking spot and walked back up to the building with them. She walked them inside.

They looked around and they spotted Mike and Tina. They headed toward them through the crowd.

“Let’s find all of the New Directions and go to the photo booth together,” Kurt said when they got close enough that Tina could hear.

They headed out through the crowd and sent each person they found to the photo booth. After about 10 minutes, they had rounded everyone up. David stayed with the jocks when Santana headed to the photo booth. They all assembled themselves and got the photographer to take several shots of them together.

Everyone had shown up in the black and white with red accents theme they had decided on as a group, with the exception of Artie who had taken the red accent to a whole new level and had worn a red tux. They all hung around and made faces at each other as each couple had their picture taken together. Kurt saw that Brittany and Santana had their picture taken together as well as Brittany and
Artie. He saw David, Jesse, and Shane move closer to the photographer, but still standing back to get pictures with Santana, Rachel, and Mercedes after the group had walked away.

Coach Sue and Coach Beiste, both in black tracksuits, stood near the stage on opposite sides, like sentinels keeping watch over the dance.

Sam took Kurt’s hand. “Will you dance with me?”

Kurt nodded and they stepped out on the dance floor about 10 feet from where Coach Sue was watching over the crowd. They didn’t do anything to attract attention other than the fact that they were two guys dancing together. They danced much the way someone would dance with their grandmother at a wedding, but they were happy to get to be together.

As the evening went along, the different New Directions members sang in groups, along with quite a few duets that Kurt hadn’t heard earlier in the day, and of course some solos. Jesse sang a couple of duets with Rachel, so Kurt wasn’t the only non-McKinley student that was singing that evening. It was always so strange to see the student body enjoying them perform, but then realize that some of those same students harassed them frequently. The performers and the audience enjoyed themselves.

About an hour and a half into the dance, Principal Beiste walked up to the microphone. Everyone quieted down.

“It’s time to announce this year’s Junior Prom King and Queen.”

The five king and five queen candidates lined up on opposite sides of the stage waiting for their names to be called. Each of them had taken a small step forward when their name was called. After each couple was introduced, Principal Beiste announced the winners.

“This year’s Junior Prom King is… David Karofsky.”

The crowd cheered. David stepped forward.

“This year’s Junior Prom Queen is… Santana Lopez.”

The crowd was quiet, and then people started to clap and cheer.

Santana had a huge smile on her face and stepped forward. The two of them headed to the center of the platform and stood in front of Principal Beiste and she put their crowns on them.

“It’s time for our King and Queen to have their first dance.” The area of the dance floor right in front of the center of the stage cleared out and Dave and Santana walked down the stairs and joined hands. Mercedes sang “Dancing Queen” while the two of them danced. By the second verse, the rest of the crowd joined in and started dancing as well.

An hour later the New Directions had finished performing. Just the band played while people continued to dance. Kurt was ready to go, but didn’t see Coach Sue anywhere. She had been replaced by Miss Pillsbury, and Principal Beiste’s spot was occupied by Mr. McCaffrey. Kurt walked to the side of the platform and stepped up one step to scan the crowd more easily. He saw Coach Beiste rounding up what appeared to be all of the members of football team and the hockey team, minus the Glee jocks, and sending them into the locker room. Coach Sue was sending the Cheerios into the girls’ locker room.

Since the jocks were all otherwise engaged, he figured that he and Sam would be safe to leave the building, but he decided to find Puck and Lauren for reinforcements. The two of them escorted Kurt and Sam out to the Navigator and they left.
They had decided on take-out Thai food for their after-Prom meal. Sam called their order in while Kurt drove. Sam ran in and grabbed their food, put it in the backseat on the floorboard, and they headed home. Kurt took Sam’s hand and they rode in silence. Kurt parked in the driveway, grabbed the food out of the back, unlocked the front door, and walked straight upstairs to their room. Sam stopped in the kitchen to grab plates, napkins, drinks, and even managed to find two placemats. Carole heard him and tried to talk to him and he smiled, but shook his head no and took what he had in his hands upstairs.

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The door to the room was open, but he could hear the shower running. He put everything out neatly on their desk, setting it up like a dinner table. He shut and locked the door. He hung his suit up quickly and headed into the bathroom.

“Can I join you?”

“Yes.”

Sam stepped in and Kurt was just standing there letting the hot water run over his face. Once Sam had closed the shower door, Kurt turned to face him. Sam closed the distance and kissed him gently. They showered quickly and dried off since they knew their food was waiting for them. Sam dashed out of the bathroom to grab some pajama pants for them to wear. They put them on and sat down.

“Thank you. The placemats are a nice touch.”

Sam smiled and started dishing out what they had chosen onto both of their plates. Once they finished eating, Kurt rinsed everything and left it all sitting on the bathroom counter. Sam turned some music on while Kurt was in the bathroom.

Sam was standing by the vanity when Kurt came out of the bathroom. “May I have one last dance this evening?” He held his hand out to Kurt.

Kurt smiled and took his hand. They danced slowly around the room, leaving no space between them, holding each other close, and occasionally trading gentle kisses. After a couple of songs, they got in bed and snuggled up.

“I had a really great time,” Kurt said. “Thank you for inviting me.”

“My pleasure entirely. I’m glad you went with me. I love you.”

“I love you too.” Kurt scooted a little closer and wrapped himself around Sam and they fell asleep snuggled up.

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The next morning, Sam woke up to find Kurt sitting at the desk studying.

“Good morning, beautiful.”

Kurt took his earbuds out, powered his laptop down, and climbed back into bed with Sam.

“Good morning, handsome.” Kurt kissed him.

Sam scooted closer and wrapped his arm around Kurt and pulled him closer. They lay there snuggled up for a little bit.
“I’m nervous, but I think I’ve got my part down. The dancing will be a challenge, but I’ve watched the videos lots of times and I think I know what to do.”

“You’ll be fine. You’re a quick study. I can’t even tell you how excited I am that this all worked out. It’s awesome.”

“You’re awesome. I love you so much.”

Sam hooked his leg over Kurt’s and pulled him completely flush. “I love you too.”

“We have to go rehearse, but I want to stay like this.”

Sam laughed. “We’ll snuggle more later. I love snuggling with you.” He pulled back just enough that they could kiss more. After a few minutes, he pulled back. “We have to get moving. You let me sleep until 10:00. We’re supposed to be at the school at 11:00. And we need to eat something.”

Kurt gave him one more quick kiss and they got up. Kurt grabbed his black button up shirt, black slacks, belt and shoes and laid them on the bed. They got dressed quickly. Kurt grabbed everything and took it out to the Navigator. He came back inside and ate quickly with Sam. They left for the school as soon as they had finished eating.

When they got to the choir room, Mike was in the outfit they had decided on, but then had Puck on a regular white tie with a black vest over the top.

“Alright. Everyone look this way. I found these vests and regular white ties in the costume room when I was looking for the rest of the white bow ties. What do you think? I kind of like the addition of the vests. It makes the guys’ outfits fancier. And I like the regular ties and they’ll stay in place because we can pin them and it won’t show since the vests will be covering them.”

Everyone looked between the two of them.

“I agree with Tina,” Kurt said. “But only if there are vests that already fit all of us without needing to alter them.”

“I found 10 vests. Get busy and see if you can find one that fits. There’s one that’s pretty big, like at some point there was a heavy-set guy. I can take that one up to fit Finn if none of the others fit him and as long as the rest of you can fit into one of the others.”

The guys all got up and tried the vests on and found ones to fit.

“Perfect,” Tina said. “Use the masking tape and put your name on a piece and tape it inside by the label at the neck. Finn, you’ll have to come home with me afterwards so I can make that large vest fit you.”

“Got it.”

Mr. Schue walked in. “Alright everybody, head to the auditorium.”

They started with Rachel’s ballad. They performed it just as they had at Regionals, but with the addition of Kurt as the third back-up singer singing a high harmony. Musically, it sounded great.
“Mr. Schue,” Kurt said.

“Yes, Kurt.”

“When I watched this at Regionals, the girls were boring, yet distracting.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, they filed in which distracted from Rachel’s singing because they did it in a way that was not in sync with the music or interesting. Plus, having the guys completely off stage makes resetting for the next song take a long time, causing dead time on the stage.”

“What do you suggest?”

“What if the guys, except me, stand facing backwards on the floor right in front of the risers? Then have all of the girls and me in position on the second riser from the beginning of the song. When it starts, all of us can be facing backwards with the guys. When Tina, Brittany, and I started to sing, we can turn to face forwards. And the rest of the girls can do the same when they start to sing. That way, we’re not distracting during the ballad. Either that or the girls need to come in and do something. Walk diagonally or dance their way in or something. We could dance onto the stage in pairs since there are 6 guys and 6 girls since Rachel’s standing up front.”

“Let’s try your first idea first. It’s the simplest. Guys line up evenly spaced on the floor facing backwards. Girls line up facing backwards on the second riser. Tina, Kurt, and Brittany in the middle. Start the song from the beginning. Rotate clockwise when you start to sing.”

They sang the song again.

“That looked good. Where are your starting positions for ‘Loser Like Me’? Walk to those spots from where you’re standing.” He watched them.

“Lauren and Santana switch positions on the risers during the ballad. Sam and Puck switch positions on the floor during the ballad. Everyone go back to their positions for the ballad into the new positions I just gave you. Rachel, sing the last line of the song a cappella. Then everyone move to the opening of ‘Loser Like Me’.” He watched them again. “Much better. So, remember your new places during the ballad. Start ‘Loser Like Me’.”

Mr. Schue had redistributed the lines in the song creating a small solo section for each person.

**Mercedes**

Yeah, you may think that I'm a zero
But, hey, everyone you wanna be
Probably started off like me

**Tina**

You may say that I'm a freak show (I don't care-Lauren)
But, hey, give it just a little time
I bet you're gonna change your mind

**Brittany**

All of the dirt you've been throwin' my way
It ain't so hard to take, that's right

**Rachel**

‘Cause I know one day you'll be screamin' my name
And I'll just look away, that's right

Quinn
Just go ahead and hate on me and run your mouth
So everyone can hear

Santana
Hit me with the words you got and knock me down
Baby, I don't care

Everyone
Keep it up and soon enough you'll figure out
You wanna be
You wanna be
A loser like me
A loser like me

Kurt
Push me up against the locker
And hey, all I do is shake it off
I'll get you back when I'm your boss

Artie
I'm not thinkin' 'bout you haters
'Cause hey, I could be a superstar
I'll see you when you wash my car

Sam
All of the dirt you've been throwin' my way
It ain't so hard to take, that's right

Mike
'Cause I know one day you'll be screamin' my name
And I'll just look away, that's right

Finn
Just go ahead and hate on me and run your mouth
So everyone can hear

Puck
Hit me with the words you got and knock me down
Baby, I don't care

Everyone
Keep it up and soon enough you'll figure out
You wanna be
You wanna be
A loser like me
A loser like me
A loser like me

Everyone
Go ahead and hate on me and run your mouth
So everyone can hear
Hit me with the words you got and knock me down
Baby, I don't care

Keep it up and soon enough you’ll figure out
You wanna be
You wanna be
A loser like me (A loser like me)
A loser like me (A loser like me)
A loser like me

They finished singing and stayed in place.

“That looked really good for a first time through. We’ll run it several more times with just the choreography so that everyone can get used to Kurt actually being on the stage. I saw a few of you almost trip over him because even though we left him space, some of you have been walking through where he was supposed to be. Let’s move on to ‘Light It Up’ for now.”

This was their newest creation. They reset and started to sing. It was divided up into pairs singing harmony for the most part, with a few sections of alternating solo lines.

Quinn/Finn
Hey, hey, hey – you and me keep on dancing in the dark.
It's been tearing me apart, never knowing what we are.

Tina/Mike
Hey, hey, hey – you and me keep on tryin' to play it cool.
Now it's time to make a move and that's what I'm gonna do.

Artie – Lauren (echo)
Lay it all down. (all down)

Brittany
Got something to say.

Artie – Lauren (echo)
Lay it all down (all down)

Brittany
Throw your doubt away.

Artie – Lauren (echo)
Do or die now. (die now)

Brittany
Step on to the plate.

Artie/Brittany/Lauren
Blow the door wide open like up, up and away.

Everyone
Let's light up the world tonight.
You gotta give up the bark – And bite!
I know that we got the love, alright?
Come on and light, light it up, light it up tonight.
Let's light up the world tonight.

Rachel/Sam
Hey, hey, hey – you and me turn it up ten thousand watts.
Tell me why we've gotta stop. I just want to let it rock.

Mercedes/Kurt
Hey, hey, hey – you and me keep on staring at the road.
Like we don't know where to go. Step back. Let me take control.

Puck – Lauren (echo)
Lay it all down (all down).

Santana
Got something to say.

Puck – Lauren (echo)
Lay it all down (all down).

Santana
Throw your doubt away.

Puck – Lauren (echo)
Do or die now (die now).

Santana
Step on to the plate.

Puck/Santana/Lauren
Blow the door wide open like up, up and away.

Everyone (Mercedes Descant)
Let's light up the world tonight.
You gotta give up the bark – And bite!
I know that we got the love, alright?
Come on and light, light, light it up, light it up tonight!

Everyone (Santana Descant)
Let's light up the world tonight.
You gotta give up the bark – And bite!
I know that we got the love, alright?
Come on and light, light, light it up, light it up tonight!

“Wow, that was really good! The only thing again is that I saw a few times where people nearly tripped Kurt or tripped over Kurt. Let’s run both of the group numbers again and I’m going to record you singing. We’ll run the choreography a few times using the recording to save your voices and once we’ve got the choreography worked out, we’ll add your voices back.”

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Kurt and Sam got back home a little after 2:00. Sam made them lunch while Kurt packed his stuff up to go back to Dalton. He carried everything down and put it in the Navigator, along with an empty suitcase, a few flattened boxes, and box tape.
He came back in and sat down with Sam at the dining table. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I just warmed up some soup and made grilled cheese. No big deal.”

“But you did it for me, and I appreciate that.”

“You’re welcome. I wish you weren’t leaving so soon.”

“I know. Me too. I just need to get back there and get my head where it needs to be. Being here distracts me and I think about New York and I have 6 exams to take this week. And 7 people to help study for their exams. I’ll be back Wednesday.”

They ate in silence. Once they were finished, Kurt started to help clean up.

“Just leave it. I’d rather kiss you for 10 minutes than wash dishes right now.” He pulled Kurt into the laundry room and held him close and they kissed. “I love you.” Sam stepped back. “I’ll see you Wednesday.”

Kurt ran his hand down the side of Sam’s face. “I love you too.” He stepped forward and gave him another quick kiss before he opened the door and headed outside.

“Thank you, Miss Burns.”

“You’re welcome, Kurt. I’ll start the timer when I shut the door. I’ll be back to collect your exam in two hours.”

Kurt began working diligently on his first exam at 8:00. He finished at 10:00, took 30 minutes to regroup and look over his next subject and started his next exam at 10:30. He headed to the dining hall at 12:30 and took his tray outside to eat in the courtyard to enjoy the weather and review for the last final he was taking that day. At 1:15, he headed back to the office and started the exam at 1:30.

Once he finished he headed up to his room and assembled the boxes he had brought back with him. He packed up the books and DVDs that he had brought with him in one box. He assembled the small box he had brought. He carefully wrapped up the photo frames he had in a few of his undershirts to protect them and put them in the small box. He started folding the clothes in his closet and putting them in the suitcase. He left in time to tutor two students before dinner. He tutored two more students after dinner.

He returned to his room and left the rest of the packing for the next day and returned to studying for his three exams the next day.

He followed the exact same schedule during the school day that he had the previous day, except that he only had one tutoring session scheduled for after dinner.

He was finally back in his room a little after 7:30. He did his laundry, and then finished packing everything in his room except all of the Dalton-issued clothing, enough underwear and socks to wear when he returned the following week for the three days he had agreed to, and his toiletries.

He looked around the room. He had his suitcase, the boxes he had packed, and his satchel sitting by the door. His hanging clothes were in a few garment bags in his closet. All that was left sitting out were his textbooks in a box on his desk.
He called Sam and they talked for a while before he went to sleep.

The next morning, Kurt was up with the sun. He dressed quickly in his Dalton sweats and started loading his stuff into the Navigator. Once he finally had everything loaded up, he headed inside to the dining hall to eat breakfast with Jeff, Nick, and Trent.

He was standing outside the door when the office opened, ready to pick up his transfer paperwork and his official transcript. He stepped inside and handed Miss Burns his tutoring vouchers for the week. She took them and gave him his cash, which he put in his wallet. She picked up a file off her desk and handed it to Kurt as well. It had the paperwork he needed.

“Thank you for having this ready, Miss Burns. It really means a lot to me.”

“I hope you have a great time, Kurt.”

“I’m sure it will be an adventure. I’ve never flown before. I’ll be back next Monday. Thanks again for everything.” He hurried out to the parking lot and headed for Lima.

He pulled into the driveway at 9:45, which gave him about two hours to get everything done at home and at McKinley. He quickly carried in the stuff from the Navigator. The only thing he actually emptied was his suitcase. He needed to repack it for New York. He opened the closet and quickly picked out the outfits he wanted to take and folded them neatly. He grabbed accessories, socks, underwear, and his travel toiletries bag from the bathroom. Once they were in, he put his tall lace up Docs in a pillowcase and put them on top of the stack and zipped the suitcase.

He took off what he was wearing and went in the bathroom and did his hair. He changed into a pair of black slacks, a black button down shirt, a gray vest, his white Docs and his white straight jacket with all the mini-locks on it. He finished the outfit off with the pendant that held the keys at the neck, where a bow tie would go. He pulled his top hat out of the closet and sat it on the bed.

He slipped his small blue satchel over his shoulder, grabbed his hat and the suitcase, and headed back downstairs. He stopped long enough to grab a drink before he looked for Carole.

“Carole?”

“Downstairs, honey. I’ll be right up.” She came up the stairs. “Ready to go?”

“Yes. I’m excited. I got straight A’s this semester.”

“I’m proud of you honey. I know you’ve worked really hard. Let’s get you up to the school.”

Kurt carried his stuff out to her car. On the drive to the school, Carole tried to talk to him.

“Honey, I’m sorry about Prom.”

“I don’t want to talk about it. I’m excited about today and I don’t want to think about it.”

“Honey, you haven’t spoken a word to him since Saturday.”

“I have nothing nice to say right now. I’m supposed to keep quiet when I have nothing nice to say. I tried not to let it get to me that night and I still enjoyed going and singing with my friends and dancing with Sam. So, I’m just leaving it the way it is. I know he loves me and he knows I love him.
But he’s not completely okay with who I am and I don’t know how to deal with that right now. I’ve been dealing with it my whole life and right now, I don’t have any more emotional energy to deal with it. I need to focus on the competition. Everyone else has been rehearsing for a few weeks and I only rehearsed with them on Sunday. I don’t want to be the one who messes something up. And about Dad – he’s entitled to an opinion even if I don’t agree with his opinion. He didn’t order me to change, so I didn’t. There’s nothing for him to be upset with me about.”

“Alright, honey. I’ll just let it drop. But things like this cause wedges between people and they grow apart.”

“He can talk to me whenever he wants after I get back. I’ll be leaving Monday morning and I’ll be back Wednesday afternoon.”

She pulled into the lot and parked. They went inside together so she could sign the transfer papers. She left once all of the paperwork was finished.

Kurt headed to Miss Pillsbury’s office as soon as his transfer was finalized. He waited for her to acknowledge him.

“Kurt, please come in and have a seat. You’re right on time.”

Kurt closed the door and sat down facing her desk.

“I received a copy of the courses that you and Sam selected from OSU Lima. And since I already talked to Sam, a section of US Government and Glee have been scheduled as first period courses. I can officially add your name to the roster for those two courses. So, you’ll have Glee on Monday, Wednesday, and every other Friday. US Government will be on Tuesday, Thursday, and every other Friday.”

“Sounds good to me. We’ll be leaving right after first period and driving over to the OSU Lima campus. Is there anything else we need to do?”

“You’ll need to get a parking pass I’m sure. But you can probably do that at any time. Just look online and find out where to go. This has nothing to do with that – but if you haven’t asked any of the teachers at Dalton for a college recommendation letter, now would be a good time to do that while they still have your academic work fresh in their minds. If you email them today, I’m sure they could have a letter ready for you to pick up when you’re there next week.”

“That’s a good idea since I haven’t been a student here for a long time and with only having US Government in the fall, that doesn’t leave me many options as to teachers to ask here next fall. Thanks for all of your help in getting this crazy plan of mine to work.”

“Well, I know the Glee Club members are excited that you’re going with them to New York. I’ve overheard them talking about it.”

Kurt stood up to leave. “Thanks again.”

She smiled and nodded.

Kurt went to the choir room and put his suitcase on the trolley with everyone else’s. He went out to the courtyard to meet everyone. He walked slowly because he was a few minutes early. He made it
to the top of the stairs right at noon. Everyone was waiting for him.

He threw his hands up. “Kurt Hummel is back at McKinley.” He hurried down the stairs and Mercedes quickly pulled him into a hug and snatched his top hat. Sam was next to pull him into a hug. Finn and everyone else passed him around hugging him after that.

Once they had finally finished all of their hugging, Kurt got his hat back. The band started playing a completely predictable song. Everyone looked to Kurt to start the song.

Start spreading the news.

I’m leaving today.

I’m gonna be a part of it.

New York, New York.

These vagabond shoes,

Are longing to stray

Right through the very heart of it

New York, New York

The rest of them joined in and sang the rest of the song while laughing and having a good time. When they finished singing they all went to the choir room. Before Mr. Schue could speak, Kurt stood up.

“I have a song I’d like to sing before lunch ends.”

“Go ahead.”

Kurt nodded and started to sing. While he sang, he looked at each person watching him. Brittany was leaning on Artie. Quinn was snuggled up to Finn. Everyone else was genuinely paying attention to him sing. Santana was clearly pleased to see him. He came to the end of the song.

It’s as if we never said goodbye.

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We taught the world new ways to dream.

Everyone clapped.

Sam was the first one out of his seat. He scurried right to Kurt and pulled him into a hug. He spoke quietly, “I’m so glad you’re back. I love you.” He squeezed him and let him go. He took his hand and led him back up the stairs to the back row where he had been sitting. Kurt took the seat next to him.

“That was great, Kurt. We’re glad to have you back. Those of you with a study hall next period and Kurt will be loading the bus. Everyone else, go to class.”

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Kurt was shocked to see that Coach Sylvester was helping load the bus. He managed to corner her during the process.
“This isn’t some trick of yours where you give the girls snacks with salmonella so they get food poisoning and we can’t compete is it?”

“No. The superintendent ordered me to stop sabotaging the New Directions. He told me to get over whatever my problem was because he wasn’t going to defend me from Mrs. Huntington and her attack lawyer a second time. So, it’s time to suck it up and play nice.”

“Fine.”

“Plus, it’s still my goal to get you back in Cheerios uniform.”

“Not likely.”

“But not impossible.”

Kurt walked away and went back to helping load the bus. Once they had finished, he and the others headed back inside.

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Everyone met up again after school and they headed to the auditorium. They ran through the set list once.

“Alright, everyone. It’s looking good. You all need to go home and study and rest. Finals start on Monday and you’re all missing two days of class review. Please don’t let this pull your grades down. I don’t want the school to get the idea that letting us compete is a bad decision academically. We’re leaving at 5:00am sharp. Only bring what the airport will allow as a carry-on. We don’t have time for you to try to add stuff to your suitcases in the morning. Study tonight.”

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Kurt was pretty sure that Mr. Schue could be fired for letting them run loose in New York City, but he already knew that it was unlikely that he would be returning to McKinley in the fall anyway. Maybe that’s why he didn’t seem to care one bit about what they were all doing since they had left the hotel unchaperoned and headed to Central Park on their own.

They stayed together, had fun, sang, laughed, and went to Times Square as well. They spent the whole day out enjoying the city together. Sam and Kurt loved the feeling of freedom to just be themselves without anyone they knew watching them.

They were back in the girls’ suite before the designated rehearsal time, with their performance shoes with them as they had been instructed, which had been Mr. Schue’s only directive after they had arrived that morning.

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At 7:00, they were in the auditorium, running their set with the musicians and the lighting crew. They were given 20 minutes on stage. They ran through everything the first time and the lighting crew made a few adjustments to their presets and they ran the numbers again successfully.

Afterwards, they headed back to the girls’ suite to hear their instructions for the next day. Once they had been told everything they needed to know, they were sent off to go to sleep early. Mr. Schue declared lights out at 10:00. He told them all to stay in their rooms for the rest the evening, insisting that they either sleep or study, and that he’d see them at breakfast in the hotel at 8:00 the next morning. They all groaned, but did what they were told.
Kurt and Sam headed to their small room. Kurt had agreed to pay for half of the expense of a single room, which made the school’s cost for the room equal to the additional cost of getting the guys a suite with extra roll-a-way beds like the girls had. So, the other four guys were in a regular hotel room and Sam and Kurt got their privacy.

Kurt flipped the extra door lock and opened his suitcase and hung up all of his clothes and put the rest in the dresser. Afterwards, he started to undress. He folded everything up and put it in his suitcase. Sam followed his lead. Once they were both down to their underwear, Kurt headed into the bathroom and into the shower.

“You have such good ideas,” Sam said as he followed Kurt into the shower.

“I do, don’t I?” he asked with a big grin. “I love it here. There’s so much going on all the time. I know it’s crowded and noisy and terrible too. But I don’t feel like I’m being watched every minute – like I don’t stick out so much here. I can just be.”

Sam lathered Kurt’s hair up and enjoyed seeing Kurt so happy.

“Do you think that it might be like this other places too?” Sam asked. “I’m not saying I don’t like it here, but I’m just thinking that maybe there are other places where we could be ourselves more easily.”

They finished rinsing off and kept talking as they got out and dried off.

“Maybe. I’ve just always thought of New York City as this ultimate goal and place that would be amazing, but that doesn’t mean that they’re might not be other places that are amazing too. We should start researching. There have to be websites that talk about the best LGBTQ cities or areas.”

Kurt finished up his moisturizing. They brushed their teeth and headed back into the sleeping area.

“I think maybe it’s time to make some charts when we get home. See if we can find some sort of city rankings based on LGBTQ equality. And then look up cost of living, income, crime, job opportunities in performance and art, stuff like that.”

“Very Vulcan of you. So, logical and practical.” Sam scooped him up and tossed him onto the bed and then flopped down beside him.

“I always wanted to be successful and happy, if possible. I’ve thought that making it on Broadway would be what would make me happy. But I’m happy and that’s new for me. And it didn’t come because of success. It’s from self-acceptance and from being loved.” Kurt rolled over and faced Sam. “But now I think that being successful would be amazing, but not as amazing as enjoying my life. If being successful is 90% stress and 10% fun, that’s not enjoyable in the long run. And I guess I never really gave personal contentment that much thought because I never really thought anyone would want me, all of me.”

“You’re getting all philosophical on me again.” Sam tickled him. “And I do want you – all of you.

“I know. That’s the amazing part.”

“As for that other stuff, there are so many things to figure out. We’ll start working on them when we get back to Ohio. We’ve got three days here and one of those we’re competing or watching other people perform. Let’s enjoy our time here.”
Kurt put his hand on Sam’s cheek. “You always help keep me balanced. I love you.”

“I love you too. I don’t want you to think I don’t like your philosophical, hard-question-asking side. I do. Just sometimes, you have to relax.”

“Kissing you is relaxing.”

“See, now we’re back to your really good ideas.”

Sam got up and slid under the covers and Kurt followed him. They snuggled up and kissed.

They met everyone for breakfast at 8:00 as ordered.

Mr. Schue told them not to leave the hotel alone and to be in the girls’ suite at 6:00 for dinner.

Once Mr. Schue left, Kurt whispered, “Let’s go,” into Sam’s ear.

Sam nodded.

They headed out of the hotel and straight for the first place on their itinerary – M&M World. They revisited Times Square on the way.

“You’re right. It is super cool,” Kurt said when they got inside.

They wandered around looking through all of their choices.

“There are so many colors.” Sam said. “Oh, look! They have costumed characters. Come on! Let’s get our picture taken with one of them.”

After the picture, they picked out some I <3 NY M&Ms to share.

“I have to have one of these.”

Kurt turned around to see Sam holding up a black t-shirt with the M&M characters in Star Wars costumes that said “The Chocolate Mpire” written below them. “It’s you. It’s definitely you.”

They got in line to pay for their items. Sam slipped the receipt into his wallet and went into the bathroom and put the t-shirt on and put his button shirt back on over the top, leaving it unbuttoned. Kurt was waiting outside and smiled when he came out.

“It’s great. Let’s go.”

They headed straight to the Gershwin Theater. They stepped inside and saw people walking straight into the theater and Kurt followed them, thinking maybe there was a tour and they got there just in time to be a part of it. Once they got inside, they realized that it was just some of the musicians that must have gone on break and come back. They took their places in the orchestra pit and started to practice. “Defying Gravity” started. Kurt sang along while standing at the back of the theater. He was mesmerized by the set and began to sing a little louder than he had been. When he finished, a woman tapped him on the shoulder. He startled and turned to look.

“That was beautiful. I’ve never heard a boy, sorry a guy sing that song so well.”

“You’re Elphaba.”
“That’s me. Do you know ‘For Good’?”

“Yes, of course. I know all of the songs.”

“Can you sing Glinda’s part?”

“Yes.”

“Follow me.”

Kurt handed his camera and his phone to Sam and followed her, with Sam following close behind them. When he saw that she was leading Kurt up onto the stage, he slipped into the center seating section far enough back that he could record Kurt.

“I’d like to rehearse ‘For Good’,,” she said to the orchestra.

The music started. Kurt came in at Glinda’s part.

_I’ve heard it said that people come into our lives for a reason_

_Bringing something we must learn_

_And we are led to those who help us most to grow_

_If we let them and we help them in return_

_Well, I don’t know if I believe that’s true_

_But I know I’m who I am today because I knew you…_

When they finished the song, she walked Kurt back down into the house. Sam approached them.

“So, my dear Glinda, what’s your name and where are you from?”

“I’m Kurt Hummel. I’m from Lima, Ohio. This is my boyfriend, Sam Evans. We’re here for the National Show Choir Competition. We perform tomorrow.”

“Well, if the rest of your group is anywhere near as good as you are, I’d say you have a really good chance of doing well.”

Kurt blushed. “Thank you. And thank you for letting me sing with you. We probably weren’t even supposed to be in here. I followed some of the musicians in by accident thinking that there was a tour.”

“It’s alright. I won’t tell anyone that you weren’t my invited guest. You’re really good.”

“One of my dream roles would be where I could play Glinda or Elphaba in a gender-bent _Wicked_ where Fiyero is bisexual.”

“Well, that’s definitely a good idea. Maybe you can persuade someone in 5 or 10 years to give your idea a shot.”

“I want to be a Broadway performer, but the roles I’m suited for musically are almost all female roles.”

“Don’t give up. What’s your range?”
“With that range, you could sing the lead on a lot of different musicals. Work on strengthening your lower range to give you more options until you get famous enough for someone to give you a chance at your gender-bent Wicked idea.”

“I’ll work on that.”

“You have plenty of time. How old are you?”

“17.”

“Keep studying and work hard at it. It was a pleasure singing with you, Kurt. And it was nice to meet you, Sam. I better get back to work.”

“Thank you for letting me sing with you. That was the most amazing thing I’ve ever done.”

She surprised him by hugging him. “Good luck tomorrow.”

“Thank you.”

Kurt was caught up in his thoughts as they walked back outside the theater. Then it hit him all at once.

“I sang on the stage of the Gershwin Theater with Elphaba. THE Elphaba.”

“It was amazing. You were fantastic. I recorded you and I got a couple of still shots before the music actually started.”

“I’m in shock. That was the most amazing thing. She was so sweet. I can’t believe she let me sing with her.”

“Well, I have proof you did.” Sam handed him his phone back.

Kurt saved the file to the cloud and emailed it to himself as a second backup. “There. I just wanted to make sure it got saved. I can’t watch it right now, but I will.” Kurt flipped through the still photos before sticking his camera back into his pocket. “Thank you for recording it. I’m going to show it to my dad.”

“So, are we still headed to the museum?”

“Absolutely, but first we’re taking a selfie in front of the theater before we leave.”

They headed back to the hotel after spending the whole rest of the day at the Museum of Modern Art. They had heard the gossip and were back in the girls’ suite before 6:00. Mr. Schue showed up a couple of minutes after 6:00 with a stack of pizza boxes for dinner.

“We heard,” Quinn said.

“ Heard what?” Mr. Schue asked.

“About you leaving to be on Broadway,” Mercedes said.
Mr. Schue was shocked that they knew.

Kurt said, “We get it. And we’re happy for you.” He remembered the indescribable feeling he had that morning standing on the Gershwin stage singing, which brought a smile to his face. He was actually really happy for Mr. Schue. Plus, he knew that Mr. Schue’s position at the school wasn’t a given for the fall.

“You’ve inspired us in so many ways, so this is just another,” Rachel added.

“I don’t understand. Who told you guys?”

“Goolsby,” Tina answered.

Mr. Schue just stood there for a few seconds.

Mike asked, “Are you okay, Mr. Schue?”

“This isn’t how I wanted to tell you, but since you already heard rumors, I’ll tell you now anyway. I am joining April’s Broadway production. I’ll be leaving Lima in a week, after finals are done.”

“Congratulations, really.” Rachel said. “It’s amazing. You’ll be great.”

“Yeah,” Puck added. “Just don’t rap.”

That broke the seriousness of their conversation. The group got up and surrounded Mr. Schue and hugged him.

“I had planned to tell everyone tomorrow evening after the competition. Goolsby’s just trying to get to you. It means he feels threatened. Don’t let this drag you down. You guys have worked really hard for this and you deserve to be here. I want you all to do your best tomorrow. I’ve enjoyed being your teacher, but you all wrote these songs yourselves. You all are the reason you’re here.”

“We’ll miss you, but you should follow your dreams. You can always go back to teaching whenever you want to,” Mercedes said.

“Let’s eat these pizzas before they’re cold,” Mr. Schue said. He stepped back and started passing pizzas out. They opened the boxes and started eating.

“Tell us about the production,” Mike said.

They ate and listened to Mr. Schue describe the story. He sang one of the songs for them. He sent them to their rooms to rest and study, if they needed to, reminding them that they needed to do well on their finals.

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“What do you want to do on Sunday if Mr. Schue hasn’t planned anything again?”

“Well, I already did something I’ve always wanted to do that I wasn’t sure I’d ever get to do. You pick this time.”

“I wanted to go to the MoMA.”

“So did I. So, you pick something that interests you.”

“How about seeing the Statue of Liberty? That website says the best way is to take the Staten Island
“Ferry.”

“We can do that.”

“The High Line looks cool or the top of Rockefeller Center.”

Kurt looked up Rockefeller Center. “Oh, wow. It costs a lot to go up to the observation decks. I was thinking it might be $10 or something, but it’s $35 each.”

“Alright, then the High Line.”

“It’s like living in a theme park here. Everything is crazy expensive.”

“I know. I looked up tickets to Wicked earlier when we were sitting around in the girls’ suite waiting for Mr. Schue. For the seats way in the back of the balcony, the tickets were $100 each. In order to actually enjoy living here, we’ll have to save up a lot of money before we move here. Otherwise, we’ll just be working our butts off just to pay to live in an apartment the size of our bedroom with no time or money to do or see the things that make New York City so cool.”

“That’s one of the things that I talked about with Mr. Adams after I had to do all that research for that seminar at school. The cost of living here is so high that I’d have to work two jobs and go to school – and that would be with sharing a place with someone or more than one person. And I’d still have to take out loans.”

“Enough of that for now. Unfortunately, I need to review this math stuff so I don’t flunk my final Monday.” He took out the review sheet and Kurt helped him study.

The group ate breakfast together. Afterwards, they rehearsed their vocals in the girls’ suite. Mr. Schue explained their schedule for the day. They were going to eat lunch, get ready, and head to the theater afterward. The main competition was scheduled to start again after lunch at 1:00 and run until 4:30. They were scheduled to perform at 3:50, making them one of the last groups of the competition to perform. The Top 10 Showcase list would get posted at 5:00.

They followed the schedule and they arrived at 2:30 and took their seats in the audience. They watched groups perform for an hour and then headed backstage to warm up. At 3:45, they lined up in the wings to be ready to perform. The curtains closed and they took their places on stage. Rachel stood at the front while everyone else faced the back of the stage. The curtains were opened and they were introduced.

They hit their marks, stayed on pitch, and danced in sync. The audience loved their songs and cheered for them after each song. They had done it. They had performed in their first Nationals Competition. They headed off stage to watch the remaining groups.

Once all of the groups had performed, the New Directions members were a bundle of nerves waiting for the Top 10 Showcase list to be posted. A couple of minutes past 5:00, they heard some shrieking and the group reassembled around Mr. Schue. They headed to the board together and found their name on the list. They would be participating in the Showcase at 6:00.

They headed to a large room where food tables had been set up for the Showcase winners. None of them ate much, but Mr. Schue insisted that they at least try to eat something because he didn’t want anyone to pass out on stage.

At 5:45, they headed back into the auditorium to await their Showcase performance. All 10 groups
performed and they were video recorded. After a 15-minute deliberation period, the ten teams were ranked from 10th to 1st. Once places 10 through 4 were announced, the other three teams assembled on the stage for the trophy presentation.

“In third place, from Portland, Oregon – The Portland Scaleblazers.”

“In second place, from Akron, Ohio – Vocal Adrenaline.”

“And this year’s National Show Choir Champions from Lima, Ohio – The New Directions.”

Mr. Schue took the trophy back to his room and gave them time to change. They met in the lobby and he took them all out for ice cream to celebrate. Santana shoved her way into getting to sit next to Kurt. “I told you guys if we could get Kurt back we could win.”

“Fine, fine. Santana, you were right,” Puck said. “It was my fault we lost him and you got him back. You’re a bitch, but this time you used your powers for good.”

“Damn right, I did. We WON!!!”

“I don’t know why you think I had anything to do with us winning,” Kurt said. “I didn’t help write any of the songs.”

“No, but you weren’t around to roll your eyes at us and goad us into doing better just to make you stop acting so damn self-righteous.”

“You are crazy.”

“Crazy smart. I told you that day that your presence evened out the bitch ratio in the group.”

Sam took his hand under the table and squeezed it. Kurt squeezed it back.

“Well, it’s good to be back – as long as you don’t all go insane again like you did during Rumours week or what I heard about Sectionals.”

“We are done with that crap, right Rachel?” Mercedes asked.

“Yes. No more spying for me. No more outing people. No more demanding all of the solos and leads. I’ve learned my lesson. I’m getting my head on straight. I’ve got my sights set on New York and I’m coming back here for college. I WILL perform on Broadway. Maybe I’ll be in the chorus at first, but I will work my way to the top.”

“As long as you don’t leave us bloodied and battered on your climb to the top,” Kurt said.

“I need to be the best version of me. No one wants a spoiled child as the lead in anything.”

“Amen!”

“Here! Here!”
When Sam unlocked their door and Kurt stepped inside, he could see a flashing light in the sleeping area. Once he flipped the light switch, he saw that the red light was flashing on their phone. He picked it up and dialed the front desk.

“Front desk, how may I help you?”

“I’m calling because the light on our phone is flashing.”

“Just a minute… There’s something for Kurt Hummel at the front desk.”

“Thank you.” Kurt stood up. “Let’s go see what it is.”

They went downstairs and picked up a cardboard tube and brought it back to their room. Kurt turned the light back on, flipped the extra lock, and put the tube on the bed. He opened it carefully and looked in the end. He pulled a black t-shirt out and unrolled it.

“A Wicked t-shirt?” He unfolded it to look at it. An envelope fell out onto the bed. He opened it. There was a note inside with a second smaller envelope.

Kurt and Sam,

Your group’s performance this afternoon was spectacular. Congratulations on making it into the Showcase. I had to leave to get ready for tonight’s performance, so I didn’t get to stay to see how your group placed. I hope you will still be in town tomorrow afternoon so that you can use what’s in the envelope.

Love, your Elphaba

Kurt opened the smaller envelope. “There are two tickets to the matinee of Wicked tomorrow afternoon at 3:00. Oh, my God! We’re going to get to see Wicked.” Tears were streaming down Kurt’s cheeks. He threw his arms around Sam’s neck. “I’ve wanted to see this since I was like 10.”

“Well, now you’re going to get to go.” Sam wiped the tears off his cheeks.

Kurt looked in the tube. “There’s a poster in there.” He carefully removed it and Sam helped him unroll it without wrinkling it. “Oh, my God. She had the whole cast sign it and she wrote a personal note on it. Let’s roll it back up carefully and put it back in the tube. I’m framing this and hanging it in our room when we get home.”

Sam helped him get it rolled back up neatly and put it back in the tube.

“We have to rearrange our luggage. I’ll wear my knee-high boots back tomorrow to make room in my suitcase to put the tube in it without crushing it.” Kurt moved to the dresser and started taking things out and rearranging them until he was satisfied with the placement of everything.

“We need to tell Mr. Schue that we’re going to the show.”

Kurt sent Mr. Schue a text. “Done.”

“So, we’ll get up early and go do the Staten Island Ferry. And we’ll go to the High Line like we planned. We’ll just leave earlier and stay for a shorter time on the High Line so we can make it to the theater on time. Sound good?”

“Perfect. Let’s get ready for bed.”

Once they had showered, they got in bed. Kurt kept wiggling around and couldn’t settle and get
comfortable.

“The maid leave gravel on your side of the bed?” Sam teased.

“No, I’m just too excited to sleep.”

“Good thing I know an enjoyable way to make you relaxed and tired.”
Kurt and Sam got up at 6:00, got ready, ate breakfast, and left the hotel. They took the subway to the Staten Island Ferry terminal and got in line to take the ferry to St. George. Neither of them had ever been on a boat, but fortunately they weren’t bothered by the movement. When they got to St. George they got off the ferry and got back in line to ride it back to Manhattan. It wasn’t very crowded since it was so early on a Sunday morning. They managed to get good spots on the upper deck on the way back and they were able to see the Statue of Liberty clearly and take good photos.

When they got back to Manhattan they went to the south entrance of the High Line and walked the whole length enjoying the view. They walked hand in hand or with their arms around each other’s waist the whole time. When they had finished their walk, they took the bus toward Times Square and got off near the Gershwin Theatre.

They decided to give Famous Ray’s Pizza a shot since it sounded much more appealing than Taco Bell, which was the only other place they saw that looked like it might be in their price range. They went inside and they each ordered a Monster Slice. They ordered one pepperoni slice and one sausage slice and split them.

When they finished eating, they still had an hour before the show was set to start. They found a place to sit and they people watched for 30 minutes before heading to the theater to wait for the show to begin.

“That was amazing. Spectacular. Stupendous. I can’t believe she got such good seats for us.”

Sam laughed. “The music and the sets – they really were fantastic.”

“So you really did like it, right?”

“It was awesome. Those sets were spectacular.”

“That’s something we’d never really discussed. You are good are making stuff and painting. I bet you’d be great at set design.”

“I had never thought of that because I’d never been to a show like that, but you’re right. Creating sets like that would be really cool to do.”

“You said you’d like to be a potter or sculptor, but you’d need another job. Maybe set design would be something you’d enjoy.”

“We’ll add it to the list of things to research.”

Sam paused and Kurt stopped. Sam stepped in front of him and kissed him right on the sidewalk in broad daylight. He shocked Kurt, but Kurt joined in the kiss nearly immediately. Sam stepped back.

“What was that for?” Kurt asked.

“No reason other than I love you and because we can. This has been an amazing trip.”

Kurt wrapped his arm around Sam’s waist and Sam did the same.
“I love you too. And it has been amazing.”

When Kurt and Sam got back to the hotel, they waited in the lobby like they had been told to do. The rest of the group began assembling not long after they got there. Rachel approached Kurt and asked to speak to him. He got up and followed her to the other side of the lobby where no one could hear them.

“I talked to my therapist again this past week a few times before we left. And I told her what you said. She said she thought it was a good place to start this week. We did some activities, which I won’t get into. She helped me see a lot of things. The thing I realized is that I’ve hurt quite a few people without actually intending to. I was trying to manipulate Finn in to noticing me and make him miss out on getting to be my singing partner at the party at my house. So, that was intentional, but what was unintentional was hurting you so badly in the process. I wanted Sam to stay in Glee Club, so I manipulated that whole situation, but I didn’t hear what Finn said to Sam and to you. I really didn’t know that Sam was gay, but I didn’t think about the consequences of how even if he was straight, he could have been a good friend to you and you pulled away from him to protect him. So, you both lost out on getting to know each other sooner.”

“I get it, Rachel. You don’t have to keep explaining how you didn’t mean to hurt me and that now you realize that you did.”

“Now that I see what I’ve done, I’m going to do my best to think things through more clearly. My therapist is helping me figure out how to do that. But I want to apologize to you, for real this time. I’m sorry for hurting you with the duets, and when I was more upset about you competing against us than I was about you leaving behind everything you knew to go to a new school. I’m sorry about how I hurt you when I asked Blaine out. I shouldn’t have done what I did when I was drunk, but I should have realized how much it hurt you and I shouldn’t have asked him out on a date. Friends don’t do that kind of thing. And what I said in the Lima Bean was way out of line and not true. I do care about you. I just get so caught up in myself that I don’t think about anyone else. Also, calling you a cheater was really uncalled for. You tried to tell me that I was wrong and I didn’t listen. I wanted it to be true so that I could get Finn back. I do love him even though you think I don’t. I’m sorry for calling you a cheater. I’ve already apologized to Sam for outing him.”

“As for you and Finn, I don’t see a future for the two of you, but I don’t have a crystal ball and I can’t predict the future. But you want New York City and Broadway and he was a simple small-town life. Those two futures aren’t compatible. Sometimes, love isn’t enough. And if at some point you two get back together before we graduate, you’ll have to face the fact that one of you will have to give up something huge to stay together. It could be done, but it will be really hard.”

“I know. I don’t know what to do about that right now. Finn’s still with Quinn anyway. And he’s still upset with me over what I did. But I am sorry for the things I said and did that hurt you. I do care. I just don’t know how to accept ‘no’ for an answer, just like you said at Sam’s party. I’m working on it.”

“I accept your apology. I don’t honestly know if I can forgive you. But if you’re serious and I see that you’ve changed, we can work on becoming friends. But real friends, not frenemies. No more of that.”

“I understand.”

Kurt could see Mr. Schue looking toward where Sam was pointing and finally spotting them. He motioned for them to move back to where the rest of the group was so they could head to the airport.
Kurt hadn’t told anyone at Dalton that his transfer to McKinley had gone through the week before and that he had participated in Nationals with the New Directions. He went to breakfast early Monday and sat with the Warblers who were there.

The schedule during final exam week was different. Each day there were two 2-hour exams. One from 9:00-11:00 and the second from 1:00-3:00, giving the students first and fourth periods as study time to review for their exams. Kurt tutored someone during both study periods. While everyone else was taking their exams, Kurt stayed in the library and used his laptop to start on the research that he and Sam had talked about.

Once the second exam period ended, Kurt headed to the Warbler practice room for the last meeting of the year.

Wes banged his gavel. “This is the final meeting for this year. We will be holding elections for the Warblers council. David and Thad will retain their positions. We will be electing one member who is currently a sophomore to fill the position that will be empty. Please take one of the slips of paper you were given and circle your choice. We’ll tally them announce the winner.”

David collected them and the council tallied them.

Wes spoke again. “The new council member is Trent Nixon.”

Trent looked surprised. “Thank you.”

Kurt raised his hand.

“Yes, Kurt?” Wes said.

“I really only came today to thank all of you for letting me be a part of this group. I wish all of you the best. I’ve enjoyed singing with all of you. I know we’ll go back to being competitors next fall, but I hope that doesn’t make us enemies.”

“Definitely not,” David said.

“I’ve written my cell phone number and my personal email address on this sheet of paper. I’ll pass it around the room for anyone who wants to copy them down. Just know that if you need something, anything, I will do what I can to help you. I know that many of you feel like you don’t have that. I can take you somewhere safe until you figure out a next move, if anyone ever needs that.” He handed the paper to Jeff and sat down.

“Thank you, Kurt,” Wes said. “Our group photos are in. Thad has them. Our senior members will be running through our song for graduation and we’d like the underclassmen to stay and listen to it as our farewell song to you. I almost forgot – Warbler breakfast at 7:30 Wednesday morning. Come eat one final meal together before the semester ends and everyone goes their separate ways.”

Kurt waited until the paper with his information on it made it back to him before he got up to get in line.

Once he had grabbed his photo, he put it in his satchel and sat back down to listen to the seniors sing. As soon as they finished, he walked to the door. He turned back and took one last mental shot of the room and the people before he left the room.
Kurt tutored one student after breakfast and another after lunch. His third session was scheduled for the afternoon before dinner. In between lunch and the third session, he walked around campus, both inside the building and out on the grounds. He knew it was his last day and it was bittersweet. He didn’t fit in at Dalton, but that didn’t mean that he wouldn’t miss some aspects of being a student there.

He ate dinner with a group of Warblers, including Jeff, Nick, and Trent. When he got up to put his tray on the conveyor, Jeff followed him and asked him to go for a walk, which he agreed to.

Kurt followed Jeff out the door, only to find that Nick was waiting for the two of them in his car when they stepped outside. Kurt got in the backseat and slid to the middle and put his seat belt on.

“Am I being kidnapped?” he teased.

“Nope. We’re just going for a drive on this lovely spring evening.”

“Uh huh. Sure.”

Nick drove about 15 minutes to the reservoir and parked. Nick and Jeff got out. Kurt followed them. They walked to a nearby picnic area, which was deserted since it was past dinnertime. The two of them sat on top of the table leaving room for Kurt to sit next to Jeff.

“So, what’s up?”

Jeff started. “Remember the night in the study room in the dorm?”

“Of course.”

“I was the one who wrote about wishing I was open about who I am at school. I’m already pretty hyper, which makes me stand out, so I didn’t figure anyone would guess that it was my confession since I don’t seem reserved or like I’m hiding anything.”

“Alright. So, you’re gay and you wish you and your boyfriend could just be yourselves at school and not hide anymore.”

“Bingo. And Nick’s my boyfriend.”

“I see.”

“Is your boyfriend someone at Dalton?”

“No.”

“Good,” Nick said.

Kurt looked confused. “Why ‘good’?”

“Because we’d like to do things with you over the summer if you want to as well. And we were hoping that your boyfriend would want to come along. And if he was someone who wasn’t out at Dalton, we knew he wouldn’t want us to find out who he is.”

“Oh. He’s not in the closet anymore. I just never said who he was after he was outed. Long story,
not for tonight.” He took his phone out and pulled up one of the pictures of him and Sam in New York City. “That’s him. His name is Sam Evans.”

“He’s in the New Directions. I remember seeing him,” Nick said.

“He is.”

“So, how long have you actually been dating?” Jeff asked.

“A little over 2½ months. What about you two?”

“Almost two years.”

“Wow. That’s really cool. I don’t know anyone who has dated for that long. Do your parents know?”

“Yeah. We told them once we decided to start dating.”

“We had told them we were gay before that, but we didn’t actually start dating until after we finished the 8th grade.”

“Our other secret is that we’ve convinced our parents to let us graduate from high school early. We’ll have exactly the number of credits we need to graduate next May. We thanked them for their generosity in sending us to a school with such amazing academics, but we told them this spring that we couldn’t take another two years of living as Dalton prep school boys.”

“That’s… well… Congratulations on being able to graduate early.”

“We took PE in summer school both summers. There’s really very little else to do where we live.”

“I thought you lived in Toledo.”

“That’s where we went to school through the 8th grade,” Nick explained. “That’s where we met Trent. His family actually lives in Toledo. We’ll tell you the whole story sometime, but before we end up out here all night, what we wanted to see is if you and Sam want to do stuff with us this summer. Findlay isn’t that far from Lima.”

“Sure. He and I are going to go to camps in Toledo this summer. I’m going to a theatre camp and he’s going to an art camp.”

“That sounds like fun,” Jeff said. “I wonder if they still have openings. We could go to the same camps. It would be more fun than taking classes again this summer in Findlay. Plus, we can drive there ourselves this summer. We didn’t get our licenses until our birthdays last summer.”

“So, you’ll both be 17 soon?”

“August 6th for me,” Jeff said. “August 12th for Nick. Graduating early won’t be that big of a deal because we’ll both turn 18 before we go to college.”

“How old are you?”

“17, but I’ll be 18 on Friday. Sam turned 18 a few weeks ago. If you’re actually serious about the camps, when we go back to Dalton, I’ll send you the links or you can follow me up to my room and I’ll show you the websites for the camps.”
“Okay.”

“Where do you want to go to college?”

“We haven’t decided. Nick wants to be an architect. I’m not sure yet. I honestly think I’d like being a realtor like my dad and that doesn’t require a degree. But I’m still looking at different options.”

“Anything else you wanted to tell me? You two still have exams to take tomorrow.”

“Nope.”

“Then let’s head back. If you want to see if you can still get into the camps, you’ll need to try tomorrow. They start a week from today.”

After he gave Nick and Jeff the information about the camps, Kurt grabbed his laundry and took it to the laundry room. He read more of the book he had been reading while he waited. He finished his packing and set his laptop up to call Sam.

Sam had Finn’s laptop and Kurt Skyped him and he helped him study for his finals the next day.

One more night.

Kurt got up at 6:00 and ran his bedding through the washer and dryer, folded it up neatly, and put it on the mattress. He washed the pajamas he had worn and his Dalton sweats as well. He did his laundry while wearing the clothes he was planning to wear on the way home. But he put the sweats back on to finish up what he needed to do in the building before he left.

He grabbed his suitcase and his satchel and took them out to the Navigator and went back in the building and met up with the Warblers in the dining hall and ate his last meal at Dalton.

Now that he actually knew personal things about the people he was sitting with, it was such a different feeling to be sitting there than at the beginning of the semester, even though he had still no idea which paper confession belonged to some of them.

Once everyone finished eating and left, Kurt met up with the student that had asked for an additional hour of tutoring and reviewed with him for another hour before his exam.

Kurt went back to his room afterwards and carried the box with textbooks and sleepwear in it and his uniform pieces hanging on hangers and headed down to the main office. He had scheduled an appointment to meet with the headmaster before he left.

Kurt knocked on his open door. “Headmaster Lawson?”

“Yes, Kurt. Please come in.”

Kurt put the box in a chair and placed the uniforms on top of it, and then closed the door behind him.

“What can I help you with this morning?”

“I just wanted to come in and thank you for your help with getting my transfer back to McKinley
ready to go so quickly last week. And I brought these things down because I wanted to see if the school has any type of program where I can donate these items in case a student enrolls here and can’t afford the uniforms and clothing. I have a blazer, several pairs of slacks and button ups, a sweater vest, a cardigan, and the school-issued sleepwear. Most of my books from this year are in the box. I won’t need them and I thought maybe someone else could benefit from them.”

“Thank you. We don’t have a program like that, but it’s a good idea. We have several empty classrooms that could be turned into a storage area. I think it’s a great idea for the next senior class president to take on. Your donations can be the first.”

Kurt nodded. “I really appreciate you approving my late transfer last semester and for giving me a safe place to study and learn this year.”

“You’re welcome. I just wish you had found the environment here more accepting.”

“Well, there’s a lot to be said for safety. I’ve not been injured in the last five and a half months and that counts for a lot. And I did make a few friends.”

“Will you be safe returning to McKinley?”

“They’ve gone to great lengths to create a No Bullying policy, but as you know, being required to follow rules does not change people’s hearts or minds and rules can be enforced only when those in charge are watching. The same people who disliked me are still there. They won’t make the school a warm, accepting place. But they will keep their hatred to words instead of actions. At least I’m not likely to end up with more broken bones. I will only be there a few hours a day. I’m facing a lifetime of hatred, Headmaster Lawson. Some of the students here dislike me just as much as the students at McKinley, but they’ve been taught to hone their hatred into an art form of keeping to themselves and limiting their group of friends to the ‘right’ kind of people. So, they bully silently, while the students at McKinley bully loudly. It’s all still bullying. But it is what it is, and I am who I am. I’ve tried to be someone else, and as much as I could force myself to do that, I’m left with the question of why. Why be someone I’m not?”

“I don’t have an answer for that. I appreciate that you have worked hard here. I wish you the best in the future. And congratulations on the win at Nationals. I know you tried to get the Warblers up to show choir competition level, but traditions are hard to overcome.”

“Thank you. The Warblers are amazing at what they do. Musically, they’re amazing. People would pay to listen to a whole concert of them just singing. It really just depends on their goals for the future. We actually met a while back and talked about that. I don’t think they’ve made up their minds yet which direction to go. Thanks again for giving me the opportunity to study here. I really learned a lot. I will miss the learning environment.”

Headmaster Lawson nodded in acknowledgement.

Kurt left the items behind and went back to his room.

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Kurt changed into the outfit he had left in his room and folded his sweat suit up and put it over his arm. He took on final look around the room, under the bed, in all of the drawers, in the closet, in the bathroom, and in the desk. He didn’t find anything. He locked the door to his room and headed down the stairs for the final time.

He went to the office to see Miss Burns.
“Good morning, Kurt.”

“Good morning, Miss Burns. Here’s my room key and my vouchers from this week.”

She took them from him. She went and got his money. She handed him six $20 bills. “I can’t remember ever having a student who tutored so many other students.”

“Well, I have bills to pay.” He slipped the cash into his wallet.

“I know how that goes,” she laughed. “I wish you the best next year, Kurt. Our school is losing a great student.”

“Thank you, Miss Burns.”

Kurt put the sweats in the passenger seat and closed the door. He looked back toward the building. He thought about all the notes from the meeting that night in the dormitory. It was hard to reconcile the smiling faces of students with the words on the pages.

He got in the driver’s seat and started his 90-minute journey home.

He pulled into the driveway at noon. He had stopped at the grocery store on the way home for supplies. He emptied out the Navigator, put the groceries in the kitchen, and put everything away in his room before coming back down to get started baking.

He pulled everything out of the bag and opened the cabinets to pull out the rest of the things he needed. He baked a loaf of the low-carb banana bread that Sam liked so much. He searched online and found some other recipes and made some spice nut cookies as well. He started to prep everything to make a pot of vegetable soup.

Once everything was on the counter cooling and the soup was slow simmering, Kurt headed back upstairs to change. He put on a pair of bondage style pants and a layered t-shirt he had made with artful cuts in the top layer that allowed the second layer to show through. He spiked his hair up like he had when they sang “Born this Way” and went back to the kitchen to slice up the bread and store the slices and the cookies before Finn got home and tried to help himself to Sam’s treats. He decided that he should be nice and make Finn something, so he whipped up a batch of the easiest peanut butter cookies ever and put them in the oven.

At 3:15, Sam came bounding into the house looking for Kurt and following his nose to the kitchen. Kurt propelled himself into Sam’s arms.

“You’re here.”

“YOU’RE here,” Sam countered. “You’re back to stay.” He kissed him. “I see you’ve been busy. Whatcha’ got in the oven?”

“Cookies for Finn.”

Sam pouted.

“I felt bad for him because I had made us a pot of soup and you a loaf of banana bread and a whole bunch of healthy cookies, but I didn’t make him anything. So, I made him a dozen peanut butter
cookies.”

The beeper went off and Kurt slipped out Sam’s arms to pull the cookies out of the oven.

“So where are my treats?” Sam asked as he wrapped his arms around Kurt and kissed him on the back of the neck.

“Upstairs in our room where Finn will never go look for them. But the soup is done, if you’re hungry. I haven’t eaten lunch.”

Sam let go of him and grabbed two soup bowls from the cabinet and put them on the counter next to the stove. He ladled the soup out and took the bowls to the dining room. He came back and grabbed napkins and spoons. “It smells great.” He kissed Kurt on the cheek as he walked back toward the dining room.

“I’m going to put his cookies on a plate and wash the cookie sheet and then I’ll eat with you.”

Sam started talking after Kurt sat down with him. “So, you need to get packed for our 5-day farm trip.”

“I thought we were leaving tomorrow morning.”

“Change of plans.”

“Are we going to get to share a room or are we being split apart?”

“Together I hope. No one said anything about being split up.”

“So, we’re leaving tonight.”

“Well, we’re leaving at 5:00 last I heard.”

“I have to pack quickly then.”

“Last night’s family dinner was informative. I’ll give you the Cliff Notes version.”

“Alright.”

“Ms. Corcoran did not have to pay for the tires out of her own pocket. The SUVs were insured on the school’s policy, but they didn’t have coverage for vandalism on them. So, the booster club that bought the SUVs paid to have the tires replaced, but they were all done by the same place and the booster club managed to persuade the place that did them to donate the time and allow them to pay wholesale for the tires. Okay – so that was not a condensed version. Anyway, Finn owes one-third of what Burt had estimated – so just $3000, since he had already given her $400. Burt forced the issue and Mr. Schue has to pay a third of the damages as well because he was the one that encouraged the group to retaliate.”

“That’s a big difference.”

“It is, and it will allow Finn to pay off the whole thing this summer. So, he starts working at the day camp on Tuesday. He’ll be in Zanesville all summer, working just 8 hours a day. And in when he gets off in the afternoon, before he heads back to the farm, he has to spend an hour a day relearning Algebra because when he took those tests, he failed the math portion and he has to take Algebra 2 next year to be able to graduate.”

“Wow. So, not much free time for Finn this summer.”
“No.”

“How mad is he at me?”

“On a scale of 1-10, I’d say 2.”

“That’s a lot lower than I expected.”

“Well, Burt found out that the booster club was going to file charges when Finn graduated. None of them were willing to do something that could interfere with Finn graduating from high school, but the booster club wants the money that it was promised. So, he’s glad that he’s going to avoid being charged with a crime, but he’s bummed about spending the summer working so much.”

“What about football camp?”

“Coach Beiste is only holding a 2-week camp the two weeks before school starts. She decided that since the team did well this year with no football camp training, that the team would be fine.”

“Well, that’s good. Do you want more soup?”

“I’m good. I want to save room for whatever’s up in our room.” He winked at Kurt.

“I see. Well, I think I’ll have some more.” Kurt got up and served himself and sat back down.

Sam reached over and took his left hand and pulled it up to his lips and kissed Kurt’s knuckles. “I’m glad you’re back.”

“Me too. Are you ready to be a farmhand for the next few days?”

“I thought this was a vacation.”

“Great Aunt Eunice doesn’t really believe in allowing people to be idle.”

“Oh.”

“But we could go out riding.”

“Riding?”

“Horses. It’s a farm.”

“I didn’t know we’d get to ride the horses. I’m excited now. I love riding horses.”

“She has 4-wheelers too. We can ride those and race around.”

“That sounds awesome. You were making it sound all dreary there for a minute.”

“I was teasing you. We won’t be idle because there’s plenty of things to do and we don’t have to be farmhands. It is a vacation. Finn makes it sound super fun. He and Carole go there every summer. I’ve not been yet.”

Kurt finished and took his bowl to the dishwasher. He put the soup into a storage bowl and put it in the freezer. He started to wash the pot and all of the stuff he had used. Sam walked over and nudged him out of the way.

“I’ll wash. You dry. You made all of the stuff. I can help clean up.”
“Thank you.”

“Done!” Kurt exclaimed.

“I have never seen anyone pack so quickly and be so thorough.”

“Let’s get this downstairs and get the stuff we need from the garage.”

“What do we need from the garage?”

“Fishing poles. Camping chairs. The tent and sleeping bags if you want to sleep outside.”

“Alright.” Sam grabbed the storage containers Kurt had put his treats in, put them in his duffle, and followed Kurt down to the garage.

Kurt got in the Navigator, pulled out of the drive and backed up to the garage. Sam opened the back. Kurt got out and grabbed the tent and put it in first. He put the camping chairs in next, the sleeping bags, and then grabbed the luggage and put it in. He started handing Sam fishing rods to put in and he grabbed the tackle box and put it in last.

“I think that’s it. Oh, wait.” He turned around and scanned the shelf. “Bug spray.”

“Good idea.”

“I put sun screen in my suitcase. And two pairs of swim trunks, but I don’t think it’s warm enough yet.” Kurt shut the back and stepped inside the garage and pushed the garage door button. As soon as the garage door was down, he wrapped his arms around Sam and kissed him. “This will be fun.”

“And Great Aunt Eunice isn’t homophobic?”

“Carole says that she’s not. According to Finn she’s a cheek pincher though. You should expect to get your cheeks pinched and then be told how adorable you are.”

Sam laughed. “I can live with that.”

“I think she’s about 70 years old, but she’s a lot of fun from everything I’ve heard. She’s like Finn’s grandma. She’s Carole’s dad’s sister, but Carole’s parents died in a car wreck before Finn was born. So, Eunice took over the job of grandma. She and Carole are very close.”

“Well, I think we have about 30 minutes before it’s time to go.”

“Mmm hmm. I suppose you have an idea of how to spend those 30 minutes.”

“I do.” Sam let him go and grabbed his hand and took off for their bedroom.

Burt and Carole took Finn’s truck, so Burt could keep an eye on it during the trip. Finn rode with Sam and Kurt in the Navigator. He was quiet for a while, but once they were on the highway headed out of town, he started to talk.

“So, I want to ask you both questions and I don’t want you to get mad at me for any of them okay? I’m not asking them to upset you. I really want to actually know the answers.”
“Okay, Finn. I will do my best to answer without getting upset,” Kurt said.

“So, I don’t get how gay couples work. Especially with two guys who are like nearly the same size like you two.”

“That wasn’t a question. I’m not sure what you’re wanting to know.”

“Well, like for Sam’s birthday, you were sort of sitting on his lap. That’s like a girl thing, but then I was thinking about it and I think maybe it’s just more of a bigger/smaller thing. Like Lauren would never sit on Puck’s lap because she’s bigger than him. But you two are like almost the same size. And like during movies, usually the guy puts his arm around the girl. But that’s sort of the same thing. The guy is usually taller than the girl so it would be hard for the girl be the one to do it.”

“I think you already figured out the answer to your question mostly. It has to do with size and comfort rather than whether one person is a girl or guy. Whenever I’m wearing my Docs and Sam is in Chucks, we’re the same height. I think that if two guys were really different in size, it might work the same way, the shorter guy would sit in the taller guy’s lap and the taller guy would wrap his arm around the smaller guy’s shoulders.”

“Makes sense.”

“If you’re asking us personally – if we were someplace we felt safe, we would probably do it both ways, depending on what shoes we’re wearing. If Sam was wearing boots and I was wearing dress shoes, he might put his arm around my shoulders. If I’m in heeled boots and he’s in flat-soled shoes, I might put my around his shoulder. But since we’re so close in height, it’s probably most likely that we’d just wrap our arms around each other’s waists since it would be more comfortable. Do you want me to continue to answer?”

“Yeah.”

“So – sitting on each other’s laps. I sit in Sam’s lap because I’m more flexible.”

“Uh…”

“I asked you if you wanted me to answer you.”

“Right.”

Sam laughed.

“So, like dates. If there’s no guy and no girl, who pays?”

“We pay for our own stuff individually or take turns,” Sam said.

“Makes sense.”

“What about like all those things guys get taught to do for girls? Like opening the door and pulling our their chairs and letting them go first and stuff?”

“Well, usually whoever gets to the door first or whoever can reach the door the easiest, opens it. Just like I’d do for you. If I were standing closer to the door, I’d open it and let you walk through. As for pulling out chairs, we just pull our own chairs out. As for who goes first, I guess it depends on what it is. We just do whatever. Like at a restaurant, when the waitress walks up, we order for ourselves and whoever is ready to order, orders first, I guess.” Kurt said. “We’ve never actually talked about this because it’s never been an issue. I don’t feel more ‘manly’ or something if Sam orders first. It’s
just a non-issue.”

Sam agreed. “I don’t think we even really think about going first through a door or something. If you’re thinking of car doors, we just open our own door and get in. If you meaning picking first, I don’t know that it’s really come up. But it wouldn’t matter.”

“Okay.”

“Can I ask something really personal?”

“I guess as long as you’re okay with us potentially not answering. And realizing that if we do answer, you will get a personal answer.”

“So, how do you decide who does what?”

“Who does what?” Sam asked.

“You know…”

“Finn, if you’re old enough to want to know the answer, you’re old enough to say the words,” Kurt chided.

“How do you decide who’s the top and who’s the bottom?”

“Well, that’s is a personal decision. Some guys are exclusively one or the other and some switch.”

“Is it like the small girly guys who are usually the bottoms?”

“I don’t have any experience to answer that question,” Sam said.

“Me either, except that what you are suggesting is definitely stereotyping.”

“Stereotyping?”

“Making assumptions about someone preferences or personality based on their looks. For example, you see someone our age in slacks, a polo, a sweater vest, and wearing thick glasses, and you assume that the person is good at chess or math. Or that they don’t like sports.”

“Okay. So, the guys at school who call you girly names are stereotyping you.”

“Not exactly, but they are assuming that by having some of the same interests as girls that I am less masculine. They assume that because I like Broadway shows that I wouldn’t be any good at fishing. And they assume that because I like to wear skirts or kilts that I wouldn’t enjoy camping. When the guys are school are stereotyping me, they assume that since I like things they consider to be feminine, such as Broadway, like I just mentioned, they assume that I will be in what they consider to be the feminine role in sexual situation – meaning, like you, they assume that I will be the bottom. What turns someone on sexually has nothing to do with their hobbies or the type clothes they like to wear. So, it’s not calling me girly names that is stereotyping. It’s making assumptions about my interests or my preferences based on a small portion of my looks or my personality.”

“Kurt isn’t a girl. He doesn’t want to be a girl. By wearing a skirt, he’s not saying that he wishes he was a girl. Our society has divided up interests into male and female.”

Kurt spoke again. “The really weird thing is this – society considers a bunch of things feminine or girly, but men who persevere to become experts are highly respected. Lots of guys act like it’s a woman’s job to cook, but a lot of famous chefs are men. Guys consider sewing to be a girly thing to
do, but a lot of the famous designers are men. So, for guys like me, it’s frustrating to have my hobbies be considered girly unless I get good enough to be famous for it, and then suddenly it’s fine. But girls can have boyish hobbies just for fun and it’s fine.”

“I think I get it.”

Kurt gave an example. “If Tina asked you to go to a fishing expo, you’d be all for that, but if Puck asked you to go to a doll expo, you’d wonder what in the world was wrong with him.”

“We allow girls to do guy things, but guys can’t do girly things without getting made fun of.”

“Do you remember when Quinn sang ‘It’s a Man’s World’ with the other teen girls that were pregnant?”

“Yeah.”

“That expression is because being a man and being masculine is the preferred way to be in our society. Being soft and feminine is not a desirable thing to be, so women who behave more like men are more accepted than men who behave in less masculine ways.”

“I can see that. You talked about his a little bit when we sang that Madonna song last year.”

“Yes, I did. So, back to your sex question. Sam and I don’t have enough experience to answer your question. Are you asking us personally?”

“Umm…”

“If you are, the answer is we don’t know. We haven’t had sex so I don’t know which way I will like it better,” Sam answered. “All I can say is that there must be something in it for the bottom because otherwise there wouldn’t be a market for strap-ons for girls to use on their boyfriends because obviously the girl wouldn’t get anything out of that.”

Sam looked back and saw Finn turn red. “If some day you want me to tell you what’s in it for the bottom, I’ll let you know.”

Finn turned even more red.

“You’re the one who asked,” Kurt pointed out.

“Right. So, like when two gay guys get married, like who would pay for it? I mean normally the bride’s family pays for the wedding.”

“Now, you’re asking questions I have no answer to. Gay marriage isn’t legal here and obviously the number of gay guys I know can be counted on one hand and none of them except the Berrys are old enough to get married. Well, I guess Sam is now since a few weeks ago and I will be in a couple of days. But that would only be if we went to Washington DC or a few places along the East Coast. You could ask LeRoy and Hiram. But I would imagine that the wedding costs would just be split in some way the families agree to.”

“So, there’s no ‘girl’ in the relationship. Well, obviously not, but I mean there’s not one guy who does the things we consider to be girly and the other guy does the guy stuff. Like guys bring girls flowers or get them stuffed animals and stuff.”

“I’d like flowers,” Kurt said.
“Me too,” Sam added.

“Not so much on the stuffed animals,” Kurt said. “I think they’re cute, but I’m not interested in starting a stuffed animal collection.”

“Me either. Plus, I think a lot of that goes back to stereotypes again. Commercials and movies and whatnot tell men to get women flowers. I honestly think that people just like for someone to do something that lets them know that someone was thinking about them. Like today, Kurt made me treats. So, that showed me that he was thinking about me.”

“He made me treats too,” Finn teased.

“Yep, I know. And he was thinking about you. How did that make you feel?”

“Happy, I guess. They were good.”

“I think maybe flowers for women became the ‘go to’ gift because society tells women not to get fat, so buying or making them treats goes against that, and most men don’t have any idea what to buy as far as clothes or other things go. So, flowers are easy. Women have to do a lot more to keep a man than men have to do to keep a woman.”

“What do you mean?”

“What do you do to impress Quinn?” Kurt asked.

“I don’t understand.”

“Do you get up a half-hour early and ponder your choices in your closet trying to figure out exactly which combination will catch her eye? Do you consider whether your shoe choice goes well with the clothing you’ve chosen? Do you buy specialized body care or hair care products to improve your looks?”

“Definitely not.”

“I can guarantee that pretty much every girl who has a boyfriend does things every day to make herself more attractive to the guy. And a lot of the girls who don’t have boyfriends do those things in hopes of being attractive enough to get a guy’s attention. Clothing, make up, shoes, jewelry, haircuts and styling. It’s time consuming.”

“Remember when Rachel came to school in her pajamas when she had lost her voice?”

“Yeah. She looked like a wreck.”

“That’s pretty much how you look every day of the week, Finn. You just throw on clothing with no regards to fashion and you run your hand through your hair when you get out of the shower and that’s that. If all of the girls you know came to school like that, you’d be shocked how different they look.”

“I never thought about it really.”

“That’s a big part of why I stand out. I do a lot of the things the girls do. I spend a lot of time thinking about what I wear. I fix my hair a certain way. I take care of my skin. Sometimes I wear make up that’s noticeable. Most of the time, I’m wearing concealer and a foundation that matches my skin tone so well that you don’t notice it’s there. I stand out because I do things that girls do every day. Girls stand out in a negative way when they don’t spend that much time doing those things.”
“Yeah.”

“The thing that’s different is that I do it because I want to. I like creating outfits and doing my hair and stuff. A lot of girls do it because they feel like they have to. It really gets to the point where if a girl shows up without her usual make up routine she gets asked if she’s sick or if something’s wrong. And that just feeds into the cycle of believing that they have to wear the make up or no guy will like them.”

Sam added, “I’m pretty sure it’s why a lot of girls won’t actually go swimming. They go to pool parties and sit around the edge, but they won’t get in and if someone throws them in, they run back into the house or changing room and reapply their make up before they come back out.”

“If you’re actually interested in this type of stuff, there’s a lot of research on gender roles and behavior.”

“I’ve never really thought about any of this stuff.”

“That doesn’t surprise me, Finn. You’ve always been top dog. You could do whatever you wanted and no one would say anything negative about it. That won’t stay the same forever though. You can get away with being oblivious about everything now, but one day it will catch up with you. If you don’t start taking an interest in something besides video games, sports, and eating, you’ll have a limited range of things to talk about with people. This is the first time you’ve ever really tried to have a conversation with me and you’ve said you’ve never really thought about something that was brought up several times already. We’re stuck in here together for 2½ hours, so I can’t just walk away because you’re boring to talk to. But when you get out of high school and you’re not automatically top dog anymore, you’ll actually have to have something to say or people will just find someone else to talk to.”

“I have a lot to think about.”

Sam said, “Kurt and I can spend hours just talking about stuff. How long can you spend talking to Quinn?”

“I’m not sure. Usually I just listen to her talk while we eat and then we watch a movie or make out.”

“You realize that she probably finds that really boring, right?” Sam asked. “People actually want the person they’re dating to talk to them. Share feelings, thoughts, ideas.”

“Did you do those things when you dated her?”

“I tried. She wasn’t interested. She thinks the things I like are stupid. She wouldn’t watch anything I like and even give it a chance.”

“But you and Kurt…”

“We talk about everything. Did you think we were in our room making out all the time?”

“Honestly, yeah. I mean guys are horny and you’re both guys.”

“Thanks. At least you see me as a guy,” Kurt said. “And yeah, teenage guys are horny, but maybe it’s because there’s nothing making either one of us feel guilty about it that allows us to just get each other off without making a huge deal out of it?” He shook his head and sighed. “That came out all wrong. Yes, it’s a big deal in that I would definitely not do that with someone else because it means something to me. I love Sam and I wouldn’t do those things with someone I didn’t love. But I don’t feel guilty about wanting to do it like girls seem to feel. So, they deny themselves? I don’t know how
to explain it. They flirt, they dress up, they kiss and make out, and then when the guy is all worked up, they just expect him to get over it without following through even though there are plenty of ways for that to happen that don’t involve the girl even having to take her clothes off.”

“Okay, this conversation just got too weird for me. I’m just going to listen to some music for a while.”

Kurt laughed. “That’s fine. You’re the one that brought up the sex questions.”

Finn turned red again and put his earbuds in.

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About 20 minutes later, Finn took the earbuds out. “Okay. So, I thought about what we were talking about. I think you’re right. There’s something about girls denying themselves and the guys that seems, like, important to them.”

Kurt responded. “I was thinking too. I have no proof, but I think if we asked a group of girls, like on a private survey, that they are just as interested in getting off as guys are. I honestly think that most guys don’t know how to do it well from what I hear girls talk about. Maybe it’s sort of a power play. Maybe if guys understood how to get a girl off and were willing to do it, girls would be more apt to do the same.”

Finn didn’t say anything.

Sam asked, “Do you actually know how to get a girl off?”

Finn turned red.

“I’ll take that as a ‘no’. So, seriously, how can you feel deprived when a girl stops and cock blocks you right before you come when you’re not going to do anything to make her feel good too?”

“I guess I never thought about that happening unless she had sex, which most girls don’t want to do because they don’t want to end up pregnant.”

“If you were willing to split the cost of pregnancy prevention and condoms, they might be more willing to have sex. But I know what I’m getting you for your birthday.”

“What?”

“You’ll find out on your birthday,” Kurt said.

“Alright. The other thing I want to tell you both is that I broke up with Quinn. She and I went out after school today and I told her that I wasn’t going to be in Lima until right before school starts again. I told her the truth that I have to work all summer to repay the damage I caused. She was actually really decent about it. I thought she’d get mad. She told me that she was glad that I was being mature and paying for what I had done.”

“Well, that’s good. I think you’ll be happier once you let both her and Rachel go. Join something outside of school next fall – something you actually like doing. Meet some people who enjoy what you do. Don’t let the girls at school use you for your status.”

“Yeah. That’s just – between you and Mom and Burt I’m getting a lot of ‘You matter.’ speeches.”

“Well, it’s true,” Sam said. “I spent about 6 weeks as the ‘object of desire’ as the top dog. It’s
flattering, yeah, but what Santana said to me really cut through to the heart of it all.”

“You never dated Santana.”

“That’s because I turned her down.”

“That took balls,” Finn said.

“What she said hit me hard. She said that I was cute and I had some buzz around the school, but she actually said I could get back at you for stealing Quinn away by going out with her. She was the one that insisted that Quinn was cheating with you and I didn’t want to believe her. I saw that it was all a game. She was willing to go out with me because I was at the top and I was cute. BUT she told me that I should keep my mouth shut because every time I opened it, I was one step closer to everyone figuring out what a dork I am. She didn’t want to go out with me as a person. She wanted to use me as a pawn in her game.”

“I let her do that last year. I was in a low place. But you’re right. It’s a game and I’m tired of playing it.”

“This is not in defense of their behavior because it’s not excusable. But for the girls, the only way to be at the top of the food chain at McKinley is to be the girlfriend of a guy at the top of the food chain.”

“Yeah, I can see that. I mean Santana’s with Karofsky now.”

“When a guy is at the top of the food chain, he can have a girlfriend or he can be single or he can be a player and go out with multiple girls and still be on top. But a girl without a boyfriend at the top is nothing. It’s very sexist. How would you feel if the situation were reversed, Finn? Earlier, you said that you’ve ever done anything make yourself attractive to a girl. What if you were a bottom feeder unless you were dating one of the Cheerios? What if the only way to be popular at school was to date the most popular cheerleaders?”

“Well, the popular cheerleaders already date the popular jocks.”

“But that’s so the girls can be popular. What if YOU had to do that to be popular? What if you had to get up every day and try to figure out ways to keep your girlfriend happy? What if you had to think about the outfit you were wearing? What if she compared how you were dressed to the other jocks and you caught her checking them out all the time? What if guys had to dress in a way that showed their genitalia off, like wearing Speedos or something? What if the girls all walked around assessing whether your dick was big enough to give you a second look the way guys look at girls boobs?”

“That would be super weird. I can’t imagine any clothing that would do that, but would cover the rest of me. But okay, I get your point. Guys do nothing and are popular and girls do anything and everything to latch onto that popularity. So, you think if I find something to join outside of school that I can meet other girls who will be different?”

“It’s just different period. Once the popularity no longer influences their lives, it doesn’t matter anymore. Honestly, really think about it. When you walk through WalMart can you tell which 30-year old woman won Prom Queen? Once people aren’t in high school, it just doesn’t matter anymore. I mean there’s always going to be people who have higher social standing than you do. You know – people who own five houses and a yacht and whatnot. But honestly, you won’t be spending time with most of those people. You’ll be spending time with regular, not uber rich people. If you move away from Lima, no one will ever know you were top dog in high school. It just won’t
matter. You have to start to be a real person with real interests and real opinions. You’ve been floating along at the top for so long, you’ve been sort of like a rock star in a way. Everyone wants to spend time with you just because of your position. That won’t be true a year from now. I’d suggest you figure out who you are and who you want to be before the fantasy ends.”

“Wow. That was less of a ‘You matter.’ speech and more of a ‘You’re nothing.’ speech.”

“It was a ‘Being top dog in high school doesn’t matter as an adult.’ speech. You still matter. I just don’t think you know who you are. I know what movie we’re watching as soon as I can get a copy of it.”

“What?” Finn asked.

“You’ll see.”
Finn rolled his eyes.

“So tell us more about Great Aunt Eunice’s farm,” Sam said.

They pulled into the Sam’s Club in Zanesville at 7:30 and Burt and Carole went through gathering up two shopping carts full of food to take to Aunt Eunice’s house. The three teens grabbed a cart and went off on a mission to buy two pizzas, lunchmeat, and cheese in the refrigerated food case area.

Carole had a detailed list and managed to collect everything in the 30 minutes the store was open. They loaded all of the food into the back seat of the Navigator and headed to Aunt Eunice’s. When they got there, they were warmly greeted with hugs and cheek pinches as expected. The teens carried all of the food in and brought in their bags, leaving the cargo area of the Navigator to empty the next morning.

Aunt Eunice had the oven preheated when they got there and she put the pizzas in while Carole organized the food and put away what had to be refrigerated or frozen. Once the pizzas were done, they all sat down together and ate.

Carole brought the DVD from the Show Choir Showcase and they sat in the living room and watched the whole thing.

“You three did a fine job. And you kids wrote those songs?” Eunice asked.

“Well, I didn’t,” Kurt answered. “I only joined less than a week before the competition because I was at Dalton all year. But other members of the group wrote them.”

“The girl that sang the solo – that was Rachel. She wrote that song. We all wrote the other two together as a group,” Finn said.

“Well, that was really impressive.”

“Thank you,” Finn said.

“I’m ready to hit the hay,” she said. “You all can show Kurt and Sam where to go upstairs. I’ll see you at breakfast.”
Everyone grabbed their bags and headed upstairs. Finn headed straight into the room he considered his. Carole showed Kurt and Sam to a smaller room, that was mostly taken up by a queen sized bed and a long, low dresser.

“There’s just one bathroom upstairs. So, we’ll just have to make the best of it. You two can shower tonight, like normal. The three of us will shower in the morning."

“That’s fine. She didn’t seem to be bothered by us, but you’re sure she’s okay with us sleeping together? I don’t want to upset her since she’s letting us stay with her. I mean my own aunt doesn’t even speak to me anymore. I don’t want to upset your aunt.”

“Honey, she’s fine. She’s just not bothered by any of that kind of stuff. I don’t think she has a prejudiced cell in her body. I’ve never seen her be unkind to anyone or talk badly about anyone because of something like their skin color or the way they dress or their weight or anything. Now, you can get an earful about lazy people or people who steal stuff.” She laughed. “But I’m sure that she’s fine with you and Sam. I would have never suggested a family trip here if I thought she would be unkind to you and Sam. You know that I have some relatives on my mother’s side of the family that Finn and I visit without you and Burt. That’s because I wouldn’t subject you to their bad attitudes. But Aunt Eunice is a sweetheart. I promise.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll see you at breakfast. ‘Night, boys.”

“Good night.”

Sam was snuggled up on Kurt’s chest tracing patterns on his arm. “My heart grew three sizes this afternoon.”

“I’m positive that you aren’t a Grinch.”

“But you told Finn that you love me.”

“I did. In an extremely uncomfortable conversation, but I’m trying to humor him. He’s literally never thought about any of this stuff and I’m hoping that by answering him, he’ll try to keep learning things. But yes, I love you. Let’s see… I would kiss you a box. I would kiss you near a fox. I would kiss you here and there. I would kiss you anywhere.”

“Is that so?”

“It is Sam-I-Am. I love you so much.” He pulled Sam’s hand up to his lips and kissed the palm of his hand and closed it. “You can keep that one as a spare for whenever you need a kiss.”

Sam laughed and wiggled a little and scooted up and kissed Kurt. “I love you too.”

Kurt and Sam were the only ones at breakfast besides Aunt Eunice. She was actually surprised to see them.

“Not the type to sleep in?”

“Well, not really. Sam is better at it than I am.”
“So, what your plan for today?”

“I was thinking we could ride the 4-wheelers, if that’s okay?”

“Sure, sure. I’ll walk with you out to the shed after we finish eating. Riding them today’s a good idea. Ryan’ll be here tomorrow and I’m sure he and Finn will want to go out riding around.”

“I was thinking maybe we could ride horses tomorrow afternoon.”

“That would be fine. Annabelle will be here about noon today and tomorrow. She can show you how to put the saddles and stuff on.”

Kurt nodded and continued to eat.

“She’s a little older than the three of you. She’s back from college for the summer. She’s been helping me out with the horses for a long time. She’s lovely.”

“I do have one question,” Kurt said.

“What, honey?”

“What would you like us to call you?”

“Oh, Aunt Eunice – like everyone else.”

Kurt nodded. “Thank you for making us breakfast. It’s really good.”

“Oh, you’re welcome, honey.”

Once they finished eating, Sam and Kurt washed the dishes.

“Carole was sweet and had a dishwasher installed for me years ago, but honestly I never use the thing unless there’s a bunch of people over for a meal.”

Kurt smiled at her.

“Carole says that you two are good cooks and that Kurt is a fantastic baker.”

Sam spoke up, “He won’t admit it, but that’s true. He makes really delicious stuff.”

“Well, I’m glad to see two young men who can take care of themselves. Let’s head out back and I’ll show you where everything you’ll need is.”

They came back up to the house a couple of hours later to get a drink and rest.

“Did you boys have fun?”

“It was awesome!”

“It really was. I’d never ridden one before,” Kurt said.

“Are you ready for something to eat? I heard some movement upstairs and the shower has been on. I think everyone might be down for brunch soon.”

“We can help you. Just tell us what needs done.”
They washed up and got busy cooking. Carole was the first one downstairs.

“Sorry we all slept so late, Aunt Eunice,” she said as she entered the kitchen.

“Not all of you did. I had breakfast with these two and they’ve already been out and come back.”

“I see they’re helping you cook.”

“They’re good, just like you said,” she smiled at both of them.

“Everything’s almost done,” Kurt said.

Carole walked over to the cabinets and got out plates and started to set the table. A few minutes later, Burt came in and sat down. By the time the food was on the table, Finn had made it down too.

“Looks great, Aunt Eunice,” Finn said. “Thanks!”

“Well, Kurt and Sam cooked as much as I did.”

“Oh, well thanks.”

“You’re welcome, Finn,” Kurt said.

“Ryan’s supposed to be here in like 20 minutes.”

“Would it be possible for me to borrow your library card, Aunt Eunice? There’s a movie I’d like to see if I can find,” Kurt asked.

“Sure thing, honey. I’ll get it for you whenever you’re ready to go.”

“Thanks. I think we’ll go after we eat and come back. We’re going to set up the tent, but we need to know where we can do that.”

“Well, when you come back, I’ll show you.” She turned to Finn. “Are you and Ryan camping out too?”

“No that I know of. As far as I know, we’re just sleeping in our room.”

“Alright.”

Finn ate quickly and put his dishes in the dishwasher and vanished out the back door.

“Who’s Ryan?”

“Oh, he’s my cousin Lori’s son. He’s a year older. His graduation is Saturday morning. He lives in Zanesville. Finn and I will be gone for a while on Saturday to go to his graduation party.”

“Okay.”

“He’ll be gone pretty early in the morning. His senior class didn’t do a skip day during the school year. He and a group of his friends are all going to this place where you can play paintball, do a ropes course, and some other stuff tomorrow.”

“Sounds cool,” Sam said.

“Would it be okay if we set up the tent before we go?”
“Sure, honey. After we finish eating, I’ll show you then.”

“Thank you.” Kurt turned to Burt. “So, do you want to go fishing Saturday morning before the graduation party?”

“Um, sure, kiddo. But I didn’t pack any fishing gear.”

“I packed most of it in the Navigator.”

“Alright. Sounds fun. If we catch anything, we can grill it for lunch or dinner.”

“Sounds good.”

“I’ll clean up, Aunt Eunice,” Carole said. “Why don’t you show the guys where they can put the tent so they can get busy with that?”

“Follow me, boys.”

They finished getting everything set up and headed into town to see if they could find the movie that Kurt wanted to show Finn. While they were at the library, Sam noticed a table that had information on local sites to see, advertising Zanesville as a “Stay-cation” destination. He looked through the information and took a couple of information sheets while Kurt was looking for the movie. He folded them and put them in his back pocket. He went to the movie section to find Kurt.

“Did you see one you’d like to watch?” Kurt asked when Sam walked up. “I brought my laptop. We could watch one in the tent if you want.”

“Nah. I already have a plan for what to do in the tent.”

“Okay. They have graphic novels. I saw them on the shelves down there. Maybe they have some new ones you’d like to read.”

“Good spot. I’ll go look.”

While he was looking, he texted Carole to ask her if anything had actually been planned for Kurt’s birthday. Her response was dinner in a restaurant and a movie at the theater. He looked through the graphic novels and picked one up and went back to the movie aisle.

“You found one?”

Sam showed it to him. “Mouse Guard? That looks like it could be part of Redwall.”

“What’s Redwall?”

“Something we obviously need to go look for,” Kurt smiled and walked away from the movies.

Sam followed him until he stopped in the audiobook section. Kurt scanned through the shelf until he found what he was looking for.

“Let’s go.”

Kurt put the first CD in and started it while they drove back. When they pulled back up to the house,
Kurt grabbed the CD and put it back in the box and took it and the DVD with him.

“How about we go horseback riding this afternoon?” Sam asked.

“Okay. Let’s just go tell them we’re headed out again. Hand me your book and I’ll take it upstairs for now.”

While Kurt was upstairs, Sam got the papers out of his pocket quickly and showed them to Carole. She folded them back up and put them in her back pocket before Kurt got back down the stairs.

“Ohave fun, you two,” she said as they headed out to the barn.

Annabelle greeted them, introducing herself and then the horses. “Ginger and Marshall are our best behaved horses. I got them out for you because Aunt Eunice wasn’t sure whether either of you had ever ridden before. They’re both older horses. Ginger is 20 and Marshall is 22.”

Annabelle showed Kurt how to get Ginger ready to go out. She actually did the whole process herself, but instructed Kurt step by step as she did it. Sam got Marshall ready to go on his own.

“You know how to do all of this?” Kurt asked.

“Sure. I lived in rural Tennessee. I knew quite a few people with horses. I’ve ridden since I was little. I just haven’t been since we moved to Ohio.

“I’ve only ridden a few times when I went to a friend of my dad’s who used to live out in the country between Lima and Dayton. They moved though, so it’s been while since I’ve ridden.”

“These two won’t do anything crazy. They’ll be good and bring you home after a nice ride.” Annabelle stroked Ginger neck and she spoke. “You two are ready to go as soon as you get yourselves up into the saddles. Have fun.”

They met Ryan at dinner. He was tall and lanky, but not quite as tall as Finn. He had medium brown, wavy hair. He and Sam got on like wildfire. He was a huge sci fi fan. He and Finn were planning a movie marathon after dinner. He had been accepted at Ohio State for the fall. The three of them talked about Kurt and Sam starting at OSU Lima in the fall as well. Kurt saw Finn’s expression change after the topic change and Kurt focused on eating rather than talking and the conversation made its way back to action movies.

Since Sam and Kurt didn’t help cook dinner, they cleaned up. They went upstairs to shower afterwards. They put their pajamas on and put the clothes they were going to wear the next day in Sam’s duffle along with Kurt’s laptop, the book Sam checked out, and a few other things. They said their goodnights and went out to the tent.

“So, what things did you plan since you didn’t want to watch a movie?”

“I just want to spend time with you. We can watch a movie any time.”

“Anything in particular you wanted to do together?”

“A few things,” he winked at Kurt. “But we’ll get to those later.”
Kurt laughed. “Alright. What first then?”

“You’ll see.”

A few minutes later, they had made it back to where the tent was. They zipped it up and fastened it from the inside so that no one could open it from the outside. Sam put his duffle down.

“Now, I’ll show you.” He pulled Kurt into his arms and kissed him. “I’ve been waiting since this morning to do that.”

“Mmm. Was it worth the wait?” Kurt teased.

Sam kissed him again instead of answering. “Always, but I’d rather not wait.”

“Sweet talker. What else is on the agenda besides kissing?”

“More kissing?”

Kurt laughed. “And then?”

“Well, I brought a deck of cards. We could play Poker.”

“Okay. What are we playing for?”

Sam kissed him again and pulled him closer and spoke quietly into his ear. “Strip poker?”

“Sure.”

A half-hour later, Sam was down to his underwear. He tackled Kurt.

“You marked the deck or you’re a card-counting card shark.” He tickled Kurt.

Kurt used his ninja gymnastics skills and flipped them so he had Sam pinned down instead. He leaned down and kissed him. He whispered, “First one down to their underwear gets blown first.”

“Is that so?”

“It is.”

“Well, I’m ready when you are.”

“I’ll get right to it.” He kissed down Sam’s neck and followed through.

Kurt rolled over to find his phone to see what time it was. It was after midnight. He put the phone back down and scooted back toward Sam and snuggled up behind him.

“Sweetie, we should get inside the sleeping bag or put our pajamas back on.”

“Mmm. What time is it?”

“A little after midnight.”

“M’kay.” He sat up and stretched. “The next part of my plan can happen now.”

“Part of your plan was to take a 3-hour nap and get up after midnight?”
“Yep.”

“Alright. What are we doing?”

“Oh, well you’re just going to lay here and be your gorgeous self.”

Kurt gave him a funny look.

“While I…” he got up and looked through the duffle. “finally get to sketch you the way I’ve wanted to for a long time.”

“Oh… How about some music then?”

“Sure.”

Kurt picked a classical playlist and started it. “How do you want me to position myself?”

Sam moved closer and positioned him. “Are you uncomfortable?”

“Nope, well other than the fact that you’re going to sketch me like this. You’ll put it where no one can find it, right?”

“I will. I’ll get a locking file and put my sketches of you in there.”

“Okay.” Kurt relaxed and listened to the music for a while. Eventually exhaustion won out and Kurt fell asleep.

Sam started a new sketch and worked on it for a while before putting his sketchpad away and turning the lantern off. He kissed Kurt gently as he crawled over him to get to his spot.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to fall asleep and mess up your sketch.”

“Can you sit up so we can slide inside the sleeping bag?”

“Sure.”

Once they were lying back down, Sam responded. “You didn’t mess anything up. I wanted to sketch you and you let me, which I know you feel strange about, but I will never show them to anyone. They’re just for me. I started a second sketch once you feel asleep. You’re gorgeous asleep too.”

Sam turned on his side and got Kurt to turn over to be the little spoon. “I love you.”

Kurt scooted back leaving no space between them. “I love you too.”
Friday morning, Kurt woke up and reached out for his phone to check the time. Sam felt him stirring and snuffled. He pulled him closer and started to kiss the back of his neck, which caused Kurt to giggle because it tickled.

“Cuddles,” he said as he wrapped his leg over Kurt’s.

“I wasn’t trying to get up. I was just seeing what time it is.”

“’S’time for cuddles.”

“Mmm hmm. You’re a snugglepus, like an octopus. Or a snuggle bear.”

“And you’re soft and cuddly. Mmm.” Sam continued to kiss his neck. “I love you. Happy birthday.”

“I love you too. I finally feel like the school year is over. I don’t have to go back to Dalton in a couple of days.”

“I won’t have to sleep alone in your admittedly awesome bed anymore. I missed you.”

“It still feels sort of dreamlike though, like I’m imagining all of this. A totally hot, adorable jock loves me and is sharing my room at home with me. It sounds a lot more like a fairy tale than my life.”

“Maybe this is where the story begins to switch from the downtrodden times the main character had to go through before the happily ever after part starts.”

He’s so adorable. “Maybe. Whatever it is, I much prefer this. If it is a dream, I don’t want to wake up.”

“Me either. Now that you’re mine, I’m never letting you go.”

“You mean that, don’t you?”

“Well, duh.” Sam tickled him a little. “I only pined after you for 6 months before I got up the nerve to tell you.”

Kurt was giggling, “Pined after me?”

Sam licked the outer edge of Kurt’s ear, causing Kurt to shiver. “Yes. Pined after you. As in kicking myself in the butt every day you were at Dalton thinking that if I had just been true to myself, you could have been mine and I could have kept Karofsky from touching you. I’m sorry.”

Kurt turned over in Sam’s arms. He saw tears streaming down Sam’s face. “Oh, Sam. Stop crying. You were new and trying to survive too. You couldn’t have known. Even I had no clue and I’ve known him since I was 12. I would have never gone into a room alone with him if I had had any inkling that he was gay. He was way too violent towards me.”

“But he stole your first kiss.”

“Nope. I decided that’s not what happened at all. That was not my first kiss. My first real kiss was the night you and I kissed in the visitor’s room at Dalton.”
“Oh?”

“Yep.” Kurt wiped the remaining tears off Sam’s face. “What happened in the locker room was like being punched with someone’s lips instead of their fist. So, it wasn’t a kiss. Plus, I didn’t kiss him. So, it was a lip attack.”

Sam laughed. “I see.”

“It’s true. If anyone ever asks me about my first kiss, I will tell them about us kissing.” Kurt scooted forward enough to be able to gently kiss Sam. “A lot like that. We were both nervous.”

“Yeah. It was amazing, though. Kissing you just feels right and perfect.”

“I feel the same way about kissing you.” Kurt kissed him again, which led to making out and the cuddling they both enjoyed.

By 9:30, they had showered, gotten ready for the day, and had eaten the delicious breakfast that Carole and Aunt Eunice had made. Even Finn had even been cajoled into getting up by the smell of bacon wafting upstairs. Ryan had left long before anyone had gotten up. Sam and Kurt’s offer to help with the dishes was refused. When Kurt wasn’t looking Carole winked at Sam and motioned for him to go ahead and take Kurt out for the day.

“Let’s go!” Sam put his hands on Kurt’s hips and walked him toward the door.

“We’re leaving?”

“Yep.”

“Where are we going?”

“It’s a surprise.”

“A surprise?”

Sam turned him and kissed him. “Yes, a surprise.”

“Okay.”

“Go get in the Navigator. I’ll be right there.”

Kurt went out the door. Sam turned back and went in the kitchen long enough to grab the flyers back from Carole to put the addresses in his phone to get the directions.

“Have fun,” Burt said.

“We will. I’ll text you later to let you know whether we’re coming back here or meeting you at the restaurant.”

“That’s fine,” Carole said.

“So where are we going?”
“It’s a surprise, like I said.”

Kurt harrumphed and turned his nose up and looked away to keep Sam from seeing that he was smiling.

“Now, now. Don’t be like that,” Sam teased.

“How I can drive if I don’t know where I’m going?”

Sam saw that Kurt was struggling to keep his laughter silent. He leaned over the console and tickled Kurt.

“Hey!”

“I could see that you were laughing already. I’ll give you directions.”

Kurt turned and kissed him. “Alright.” Kurt started the SUV up and headed out to the road.

Sam navigated and it wasn’t too long before they had reached their destination.

“There’s an art museum here?” Kurt asked completely surprised that some place so small would have an art museum. He parked and they got out.

Sam took his hand as they headed inside. Kurt looked at him almost confused.

“What? I’m not embarrassed. Are you?”

Kurt interlaced their fingers. “Of course not. I was just surprised.”

“Well, we’re both adults now. We’re not being obscene. If the museum doesn’t want gay people to view their art then they can refuse to sell us tickets or ask us to leave. I’m not going to pretend that I’m not in love with you at a museum.”

“Okay.” Kurt nodded. He used his free hand to wipe his eyes.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah. I’m great. Just a bit overwhelmed, but I’m great. Let’s go inside.”

“I’ve died and gone to pottery heaven. Look at this room!”

Kurt smiled and squeezed his hand. “Let’s go look.”

“I don’t want to bore you to death. It’s your birthday.”

“I’m not going to be bored. Come on.”

Sam carefully inspected each case and looked at every piece in the room. After an hour, he asked Kurt again, “You’re sure you’re not bored?”

“I’m sure. It’s beautiful. I’ve never even imagined so many different pieces could exist.”

“It just feels backwards, like we’re doing what I like on your birthday.”

Kurt stepped closer and spoke in a low voice. “I have never in my whole life had a friend who
wanted to spend my birthday with me. I’m having a good time. Please have fun with me instead of feeling guilty. I like being with you. Were you bored when we went to see Wicked, even though that’s more ‘my’ thing?”

“Not at all. That was cool.”

“This is cool. Being with you is fun. Don’t spoil your fun or mine by feeling like I’m not enjoying myself.”

“You’re right. I should stop second-guessing everything. We’re honest with each other. You say you’re having fun. I believe you.”

“Good. The fact that you found something for us to do that would be interesting in a small rural town in Ohio is really sweet. You didn’t have to do anything like that, but you did. Let’s keep looking around.”

A little before 1:00, they were heading out of the parking lot.

“Now where?”

“Lunch.”

“Good idea. Which way?”

Sam gave him directions into the downtown area. Kurt found a parking spot and they hopped out. Sam took his hand and they walked around the corner and down the street.

“It has good reviews. Best sandwich shop in town, supposedly. The menu looked fun.”

They stepped inside and got in line. Kurt asked to sample the sweet & sour slaw, which he loved and then ordered a pastrami sandwich with a side of the slaw. Sam tasted the slaw as well. He ordered a gyro with a side of the slaw. Once their orders were ready, they took them to go.

“I want to show you something really strange, but it’s actually the opposite direction of where we’re going.”

“Alright.”

Sam directed Kurt to the Y bridge.

“You’re right. This is the weirdest bridge I’ve ever seen, but it’s definitely cool.”

“Turn over there. We’ll turn around and go back the way we came to head to where I want to take you.”

He directed Kurt to a park that wasn’t very far away. Kurt pulled into the parking lot. Sam reached in the back and grabbed their food. They found a picnic table and enjoyed a quiet lunch together.

“We’ll have to tell my dad about the deli. He’d like it. Carole probably already knows about it since she comes here so frequently.” He scooted closer to Sam after he had finished eating and put his hand on Sam’s thigh. “Thank you. This is really nice.”

“You’re welcome.” He wrapped his arm around Kurt’s waist.
“Are you ready to go to the next place?”

“There’s more?”

“Yes.”

He looked around and didn’t see anyone anywhere. He glanced at Sam, who noticed him looking at him and turned to face him. He saw such warmth in his gaze—it made his whole body feel warm. He reached up and put his hand on the side of Sam’s face and leaned in and kissed him gently. “I love you. Let’s go wherever else you planned to take me.”

Kurt and Sam were sitting in the Navigator talking after the studio had closed. “I can’t believe Alan Cotrill was actually there and talked to us. Oh, my God. That was absolutely amazing.”

“I have photographic proof,” Kurt teased. “His statues are remarkable. That was definitely a great find.”

“I wasn’t expecting him to be there and to be so nice. Not that I thought he was mean, but I just expected someone so famous and good at what he does to be too busy to talk to high school students.”

“Well, he wasn’t like that.”

“Nope, not at all.”

Kurt’s phone pinged. He pulled it out to look at it. He read the message. Sam remembered that he needed to text Carole, so he did that while Kurt was responding to the text he had gotten.

“That was Jeff and Nick wishing me a happy birthday. I forgot that our birthdates came up Tuesday when I was talking to them. They’ll both be 17 in August, but I don’t remember the dates. One of them has a good memory.”

“That was nice.”

“It was.” *Unusual, but nice.* “So, are we heading back to Aunt Eunice’s now?”

“No.”

“No?”

“We’re headed in that direction though.”

“Alright.” Kurt drove out of the parking lot heading toward the farm. About 10 minutes later, Sam had him turn left. A couple of blocks later, he saw a shopping area.

“There. Over there. We’re going for out for a steak dinner.”

Kurt found a parking spot along the side and they walked around the building to the entrance to find Burt, Carole, Finn, and Aunt Eunice waiting for them. They walked up to where they were waiting and started to talk to them when Jeff came bounding around the corner from the other side and practically knocked Kurt over with the hug he gave him.

“Jeff?” Kurt managed to squeak out.
Nick came walking around the corner at a normal pace and started laughing when he saw what Jeff had done.

“Well, now, you’ve met the non-Dalton Jeff, I see,” Nick said, still laughing.

“I guess I have.” Kurt had a huge smile on his face. “So, how did you two end up way out here?”

“A little birdie invited us,” Nick said. He gave Kurt a much gentler hug.

“Right.”

“So, who’s hungry?” Burt asked. He opened the door to usher the group inside.

They stood around for a few minutes waiting to be seated. Sam stood behind Kurt and whispered where only Kurt could hear. “You’re not upset I invited them are you?”

“No. I was just surprised. I still am. They drove 2½ hours to come.”

“They’re your friends.”

Kurt just nodded.

They were led to a long booth. Finn scooted in, Burt followed him, then Carole, and Aunt Eunice sat on the end. On the other side Sam, Kurt, Jeff, and Nick slid in. They looked through their menus and made their choices. The waitress got their orders and brought their drinks back.

“Let me introduce everyone, now that we’ve ordered.” Kurt pointed across the table. “Aunt Eunice, Carole and Burt, my parents. Finn, my brother.”

Nick and Jeff nodded.

Kurt continued. “This is Sam, who you obviously spoke to on the phone at some point.”

Jeff laughed and nodded.

“And this is Jeff and Nick. They live in Findlay and go to Dalton.”

“It’s nice to meet the two of you,” Carole said.

“You too, ma’am,” Nick said.

“Don’t ‘ma’am’ and ‘sir’ them,” Sam said. “Been there, done that – got told to stop.” He laughed.

“Got it,” Jeff said. “So, our good news is that we got into the camps. It’s going to be so much fun.”

Burt asked, “So you two are going to go to those camps in Toledo then?”

Nick answered, “Yes. We thought it sounded like a whole lot more fun than taking summer classes in Findlay again like we did the last two summers. Since we already took both semesters of PE, we’d actually have to take something and study, and I’m not sure there are many decent options or even any that we haven’t already taken. Most of the summer classes offered are to repeat required courses for people who didn’t pass the course during the year.”

“So, are you two going to be seniors as well?” Finn asked.

“Yeah. Next year’s our last year at Dalton,” Nick said.
“It’s a great school, but a lot too stuffy for my tastes,” Jeff said.

Burt smiled, knowing that Kurt felt the same. “So, do you two have some idea what you want to do after high school?”

“I want to be an architect,” Nick said.

“I think I want to be a realtor like my dad, but I’m looking into different college degrees that might be a good fit in case I don’t really like being a realtor. I’m considering studying to be an electrician as well. Nick’s dad flips houses. Our dads work together a lot.”

They continued to talk while they ate. Once the plates had been cleared, the waitress offered dessert.

Carole shook her head. “We have dessert at home, but thank you for offering.”

Nick and Jeff covered their own meals. Sam paid for his own as well, despite Burt trying to pay for everyone.

“Let’s get going,” Burt said.

“Where are we going?” Kurt asked.

“You’ll see,” Finn answered.

On the short drive to their next destination, Kurt asked, “Alright, how did you invite them? And why on earth would they drive 2½ hours just to see me?”

“Well, first question first. I used your phone when you were out of the room. I texted Jeff and gave him my number to text me back. Then I deleted the text.”

“Sneaky, but sweet.”

“As for why they would drive to see you – they’re your friends. They like you. I think you’ve gotten a totally warped sense of friendship from being in the New Directions.”

“They’re the only friends I’ve ever had.”

Kurt pulled into the parking space next to Burt.

Sam reached over and took his hand. “Okay. Well, they aren’t the best examples of friends. Let’s give Nick and Jeff a chance. They obviously like you enough to drive 2½ hours to see you and camp with us tonight and spend tomorrow on the farm.”

“Really? They’re staying too?”

“Yes, really. Let’s get out before everyone thinks we’re in here making out.”

“Mmm. Good idea for later.”

They got out and walked up to the theater and got in line with everyone to see *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides.*
Kurt waited in the living room like he had been asked to do and went to the kitchen when he was called. He walked in to find a gorgeous layered strawberry shortcake with strawberry whipped cream frosting and halved strawberries around the top of the cake.

“You weren’t kidding when you said that there was dessert at home. Wow! Thank you. It’s beautiful.”

“Aunt Eunice made it. I just helped,” Carole said.

Everyone started in singing “Happy Birthday” to him. He stood there in awe of the whole thing with a huge grin on his face. It had always just been him and his dad on his birthday. A few tears streamed down his cheek – bittersweet tears of having people who cared, but missing his mom.

He wiped his eyes and said, “Thank you.”

Carole got a knife out and sliced the cake up. They all sat down around the table and enjoyed it.

“This tastes even better than it looks,” Nick said.

“It’s delicious,” Jeff agreed.

“You’re welcome, honey. I’m glad everyone’s enjoying it.”

Carole collected up everyone’s plates and forks and put them in the dishwasher. “Did you boys bring sleeping bags?”

“Yes,” Nick answered. “They’re in my car.”

“Alright then, I guess everyone’s set,” Aunt Eunice said. “I’m going to head on to bed.” She pulled Kurt into a hug. “I hope you had a happy birthday, honey.”

“I did. Thank you for the beautiful cake. It was fantastic.”

She pinched his cheek. “You’re welcome, honey.” She headed to her bedroom.

Sam said, “Come on. I’ll show you where we’re camping.” Nick and Jeff followed him out the front door.

Carole and Finn went upstairs and left Burt and Kurt in the kitchen together.

“I’m glad you had a good time today, kiddo. Sam’s a good guy.”

“He is. He planned a fun day for us.”

“I’m sorry about Prom. Sam was right. My old Lima mentality slipped right out of my mouth. I don’t want to be that guy, Kurt.”

“I know, Dad. I know.”

“Now, you’re all grown up. I’m proud of you, kiddo. You’ve been through so much and survived. Your new friends seem like nice guys.”

“They are. I was surprised they came all this way. Sam said I have a warped idea of friendship.”
“Possibly. I think several of your friends fall into the – what do they call them – frenemies. Nice to your face – stab you in the back to get ahead. And some of them are just acquaintances that you spend a lot of time with, not really friends. But some people have just one or two close friends and that’s fine. You just have to learn to tell the difference to know which ones are really your friends.”

“Yeah. I’m working on that. When I look at the group honestly, I don’t know if I really see any of them being part of my life long term. I know that Mercedes wants to try to reclaim her BFF status, but we’ll have to see. Rachel cast me as her ‘best gay’, but she should really get Blaine to fill that role. She doesn’t see him as her competition the way she sees me. I don’t want to talk about that. Anyway, I’m working on figuring out the future. I had everything planned out and that class I took washed in like the tide and knocked all my sandcastles down.”

“I don’t know that that means.”

“It means that all of the things I had been building up in my mind about how I wanted my future to go were just sandcastles, easily washed away. I need to build up new plans that can withstand the tide. I wanted to go to college in New York City.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“At the schools I was considering, a single year’s tuition, plus the cost of living there for a year is like $75,000.”

“That’s insane.”

“Yeah. That’s more than the cost of three years of a state school. Add another $10,000 and it would cover my entire four years at a state school. So, I need a new plan. That class taught me that students in my situation struggle to afford college because as a family we make too much money for me to be eligible for grants. I’ll have to rely on scholarships, whatever you can help me with, and then take out loans to pay the difference. I know that you can’t afford much and I’m not upset about that. It’s just that I need to rework my vision.”

“Who can afford $300,000 for four years of college?”

“I don’t know, Dad. I looked into programs in other states, like Indiana. Indiana University has an amazing music school, but with out-of-state tuition and room and board, it’s like $45,000 a year.”

“Wow. I’m glad you took that class, but I’m shocked at the prices. I never went to a big state school, but I’m certain that it wouldn’t have been that expensive to go.”

“No, it wasn’t. That was part of the research we did. I looked up Ohio State. To attend in 1988, which was the year we were given to research since it was about the middle of when our parents would have attended college, it was about $3,500 a year to attend Ohio State. Now, it’s about $21,000 for in-state students. So, a nearly seven-fold increase in cost.”

“That’s absurd. I don’t make 7 times what my parents made.”

“And I’m not willing to take on $200,000 in school loans and work full time while trying to go to school full time just so I can go to school in New York City. So, I’m searching for other good programs that are more affordable.”

“Well, that’s good. We’ve gotten way off track and your friends and Sam are going to wonder where you are.”

Just then, Sam came back in the front door. Kurt stepped into the living room.
“You coming?”

“Yeah, but don’t we want to change?”

“That’s what I came back to do since you didn’t come out with our pajamas. Let’s go change and head back out.”

“I’ll be right up.” Kurt went back toward the kitchen, but Burt was already coming into the living room. “Thanks for dinner and the movie, Dad.” Kurt stepped closer and hugged Burt. “I think we’re going fishing Sunday morning instead.”

Burt laughed. “I almost gave it away the other night when you asked me to go tomorrow morning.”

“Sunday morning?”

“Nope. Monday morning. Sunday’s the Indy 500.”

“Right. I forgot about that.”

“Like always, but it’s okay. We’ll fish Monday. And if we catch anything we’ll grill it up with the other stuff we bought at Sam’s Club for the cookout.”

Kurt smiled and nodded. He headed upstairs to change.

Sam took Kurt’s hand as they stepped out the back door and headed for where the tent was. He turned the flashlight on so they could see where they were walking.

“He apologized for Prom.”

“That’s good.”

“He’s trying. I know he didn’t mean it in a bad way. He just doesn’t want us to get hurt.”

“I know. He just aggravated me.”

“Thank you for defending me that night. I never did thank you.”

“You don’t need to thank me. I thought you rocked that outfit. I wasn’t embarrassed. You’re gorgeous.” Sam pulled Kurt’s hand up and kissed his knuckles. “And your friends are crazy. Good crazy, though.”

“I’ve never seen them crazy. This should be interesting.”

Sam stopped about 20 feet from the tent and turned the flashlight off. He pulled Kurt closer and wrapped his arms around him and kissed him. “I love you. I had a lot of fun with you today.” He kissed him again. “I know they know that we’re a couple, but I didn’t know what either one of them would think about actually seeing us act like a couple. One more kiss.” Sam leaned forward and kissed Kurt once more before turning the flashlight back on and walking to the tent.

“Knock, knock,” Kurt said, waiting for one of them to unzip the tent.

“Who’s there?” Jeff responded.

“Lettuce.”
“Lettuce who?”

“Let us in please, it’s dark out here.”

Jeff laughed and unzipped the tent to let them in.

Sam stepped in and Kurt followed, zipping the tent back up after he was inside.

“So, you drove 2½ hours to sleep outside?”

“It’s an adventure,” Nick said.

“Exactly,” Jeff agreed cheerfully.

“How adventurous are you willing to be? We can go horseback riding tomorrow and we can take turns on the 4-wheelers.”

“Yes!” Jeff said. “I love 4-wheelers.”

“And yes, to the horseback riding. We like that too.”

“Well, then adventure awaits.”

“Actually, we have a small problem,” Jeff said.

“What’s that?”

“We should have gone to the bathroom when were up at the house.”

Kurt laughed. “Oh. Follow me.” Kurt grabbed the flashlight. “You’ll need shoes.”

They put their shoes back on and followed Kurt. He led them to the horse barn and showed them the bathroom.

“Oh, this is a lot better than I had imagined,” Jeff laughed. “I thought you were taking us to an outhouse.”

Kurt laughed. “I’d have taken you back to the house instead of an outhouse.”

On the walk back, Jeff asked, “Did you tell Sam that we’re a couple?”

“No. I don’t out people. I know that you’ve kept it a secret around Dalton, so I didn’t know if anyone besides your parents knew. I don’t tell people’s secrets.”

“Well, that’s good to know, but we’re done keeping it a secret. When we go back to Dalton in the fall, we’re going to be open about it.”

Nick added, “We don’t care if the stuffy-shirts decide to not hang out with us anymore. We’re just going to roll with whoever still wants to hang out and just let the rest go. If they don’t want to be friends with the real ‘us’, then good riddance.”

“Alright then. You can tell Sam when we get back. All he knows is that you two are best friends and that you are two of the three people who were genuinely nice to me at Dalton. Well, he knew you live in Findlay and that you were trying to get into the camps for something fun to do for the summer.”
“We’ll tell him,” Nick said.

Sam let them in when they got back. Kurt zipped the tent and fastened the zipper in place again once they were all inside. They slipped their shoes back off and Nick sat down and Jeff sat right next to him.

“It was much nicer than we had expected,” Jeff laughed.

“He thought I was taking them to an outhouse,” Kurt said as he sat next to Sam.

Sam laughed.

“We want to tell you something,” Nick said.

“Alright,” Sam said.

“Jeff and I have been together for two years. We’re gay. Kurt’s known since Tuesday when we told him, but he said he didn’t tell you.”

“Yeah, Kurt doesn’t tell other people’s secrets,” Sam said.

“We know that now. I mean we knew he didn’t out people in general, but we figured he had told you since you’re dating.”

“Oh. No, if someone tells him a secret, he won’t even tell me.”

Jeff spoke up. “We’ve kept it a secret at Dalton all this time, but our parents have known since we first started dating. We told them we were gay and that we were dating and they were fine with it.”

“My parents are fine with it too,” Sam said. “I was inadvertently outed as bisexual by a gossip rag purporting to be our school newspaper back maybe a month ago. Not the way I’d suggest to come out, especially if you’re not bisexual.”

Nick and Jeff both looked confused.

“Long story. Long, ridiculous story. We’ll skip telling it for now,” Kurt said.

“Okay,” Nick said. “You can tell us on the way to Toledo and back some day.”

“Joy, joy,” Sam said sarcastically. “It’s fine. What’s done is done. Kurt and I have been dating for almost three months.”

“So, it’s okay if we do our sleeping bags like yours, right?” Jeff asked.

“Yeah, sure,” Kurt said. “Please be yourselves all the time. Are your parents squeamish about you showing PDA?”

“No. It doesn’t bother them,” Nick answered. “Why? Does it bother your parents?”

“Well, it doesn’t bother Carole,” Sam said. “She’s a hoot and she teases us. She caught us kissing in the laundry room and just teased us about it. Burt’s never seen us kiss other than the quick peck I gave Kurt right before we left for Prom, so I don’t know. I guess it could go either way with him.”

“My dad’s still working through Lima-ingrained homophobia. He’s a work in progress. In theory,
he’s overcome it completely. In daily life, his knee-jerk reactions are sometimes less than what I’d hope for, but he loves me and he keeps working at it. He mostly just wants to protect me. It’s not that he wants me to be different. He wants me to be safe. And being myself in Lima isn’t safe for me.”

“We don’t get hassled in Findlay, but maybe it’s because we never went to junior high or high school there, so no one our age really knows us. And the ones we met going to summer school were either trying to get ahead or had flunked PE. Neither group bullied us.”

“Maybe people there just mind their own business,” Sam said. “No one said anything to us around town today. Maybe some places aren’t necessarily more accepting, they’re just less oppressing.”

“I could live with that,” Kurt said. “I don’t need everyone I meet to be my friend. I’d just like them to not be my enemy. Mutual ignoring works fine for me.”

Nick got on his hands and knees to zip the two sleeping bags together. Jeff grabbed their pillows and put them at the top. He and Jeff plopped back on the pillows, lying on their backs.

Kurt turned the lantern off and he and Sam lay down on their backs as well.

“Just to make sure we’re all good. We can kiss, and snuggle and sleep cuddled up and you’re okay with that?” Nick asked.

“Yes, absolutely,” Kurt said. “And not that you’re asking, but I’ll just put it out there – we’re exclusive, no group things, no voyeurism either way. We’re all guys, so I don’t care if you go shirtless, but pants stay on when we’re all four together. And yes, I know some people are really into that kind of thing and that’s fine. But it’s just not for me.”

“No problem. Us either. You’re actually the first gay couple we’ve made friends with.”

“Us too,” Sam said. “We only know one other out gay guy our age and you know him too.”

“So, tomorrow, it’s okay for my parents to know?”

“We’re out now. All the way out. Out everywhere,” Jeff laughed. “I know what we should do!”

“What?” Nick asked.

“First Warbler meeting in the fall, you and are going to sing ‘I’m Coming Out.’”

Nick laughed. “I’ll do it if you want.”

“It will be epic,” Jeff said confidently.

“I’m sure it will be,” Kurt said. “Get Trent to record it, so we can watch it.”

“Good idea,” Jeff said.

“How long are you guys staying tomorrow?” Kurt asked.

“Until after dinner. Our parents are having a Indy 500 party on Sunday with some friends and family.”

“Let’s get some sleep so we’re not too tired to do anything tomorrow.”
The four of them headed back to the house the next morning after they packed everything from the tent up and collapsed the tent and put it back in the Navigator.

Kurt and Sam showered quickly and got ready for the day. They headed downstairs and started breakfast while Nick and Jeff showered.

When they came downstairs, Jeff walked up to Kurt and quietly asked, “What about Aunt Eunice? Is she okay with us being gay?”

“Oh, yeah. She’s been super sweet. Carole told her ages ago that I was gay and she was fine with it. And she’s fine with me and Sam. We spent the first night together in the bedroom upstairs you were just getting ready in.”

“Okay. I just didn’t want to cause any problems.”

“Nope, no problems. Everything’s ready. Grab a plate from the table and help yourselves.”

They sat down and talked about their plan for the day. They loaded the dishwasher and Nick and Jeff washed and dried the pans.

“So, you’re not camping out anymore?” Jeff asked.

“The forecast said rain starting in the middle of the night tonight. I’d rather put the tent away and it be dry. We can always get it back out if we want to,” Kurt said. “That tent isn’t ready for a downpour. I need to set it up at home and retreat it with some really good waterproofing before we take it out when it might rain.”

“That makes sense.”

Carole came downstairs. “Before you head back outside, I just wanted to tell you that we’ll be back around 4:00. The party is from 12:30-3:30.”

“Okay. Have fun! We’ll see you when you get back.”

They spent the morning horseback riding. Afterwards, they went straight upstairs to clean up a little before they started working on lunch.

When they came back downstairs, Kurt and Sam pulled out the lunchmeats, cheeses, and bread. Kurt found a fruit salad and a chopped vegetable salad in the fridge with post-it notes on them saying they were for lunch. He put them on the table as well. Nick and Jeff made themselves sandwiches. Kurt chopped the lunchmeat and cheese up for him and Sam to put on their salads.

“There’s leftover birthday cake too,” Kurt said. “In case anyone wants a piece.”

“I do,” Jeff said.

“Me too.”

“So, Tuesday morning, do you want to meet and go together?” Kurt asked.

“Definitely,” Nick said. “I decided to try the acting camp with you because I still get really nervous when I have to give speeches and I think it will help me get over it before I go to college.”

“And I think the whole glassblowing thing looks totally amazing. I’ve never taken any art classes at
Dalton, but it looks really cool. We kind of decided to do the opposite of what would naturally appeal to us. Sort of step outside our comfort zones and do something completely different.”

“Well, you surprised me. I figured Jeff was coming with me and Nick was going to an art camp since he’s the one that wants to be an architect,” Kurt said.

“We figured since it’s not for a grade this time that we’d try something new,” Nick said.

“We’re hoping to add it to our CVs for college,” Kurt said. “I’m hoping to get a lead role since I went to Dalton too late to be in their fall play and Mr. Schue in his insanity had us do The Rocky Horror Picture Show last fall and we didn’t get to perform it for anyone except ourselves, and the year before, the production was cancelled.”

“What kind of teacher thinks that The Rocky Horror Picture Show would be a good high school production?”

“Obviously one who doesn’t really think,” Sam said. “But I’m hoping to be semi-decent at the glass blowing and add one of the pieces I make to my art portfolio.”

They talked more about the colleges they were considering and finished eating and cleaned up after themselves before heading out to ride the 4-wheelers.

“Thanks for letting us stay, Aunt Eunice. We had a great time,” Nick said.

“You’re welcome. Burt says that school you go to is pretty uppity. You’re welcome to come back any time. It’s only like an hour drive from here.”

“That’s really nice of you to offer. We’ll see what we can work out.”

Kurt and Sam followed them out to Nick’s car.

“She’s sweet,” Jeff said.

“She is,” Kurt agreed. “I guess we’ll see you Tuesday morning. Thanks again for driving all this way.”

“We had a good time,” Nick said as he opened his car door.

Jeff opened the passenger door and waved. “See you Tuesday.”

They waved as they drove off.

Kurt and Sam went back inside.

“Movie night!” Kurt declared loudly as he went inside. “I’m showing Finn the movie I wanted him to see.” He herded Finn upstairs to his room. Sam followed. He and Finn sat on the end of Finn’s bed. Kurt grabbed the DVD and put it in his laptop. He put it on the dresser and sat on the floor in front of Finn’s bed between Sam’s legs. “You might hate it, but there’s a reason why I want you to watch it.”

Finn nodded. “It’s a chick flick, isn’t it?”
“It’s a rom com, so yes. But that’s not why I want you to watch it. It’s early enough that you can watch something else downstairs with everyone else afterwards if you want. Something with lots of explosions and battles.”

Finn rolled his eyes. “Just press play already.”

*Runaway Bride* started.

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“So you think I’m like Maggie, don’t you?”

“Not yet, but you could be. That one scene when she explains why she ran…” Kurt found the point in the DVD and played it again.

*When I was walking down the aisle, I was walking toward someone who didn’t have any idea who I really was. And it was only half the other person’s fault because I had done everything to convince him that I was exactly what he wanted. So, it was good that I didn’t go through with it because it would have been a lie.*

“She didn’t know who she was.”

“Let’s go for a walk, just the two of us.”

Once they were outside, Kurt started to talk again. “I think that’s where you are right now. You don’t know who you are. You know what you are. You’re the quarterback. You’re the male lead singer in New Directions. You’re the top dog. Everyone wants to be your friend because of that. Once high school ends, that will all fade away. People will move on, get jobs, grow up, and you’ll be the guy who was popular in high school.”

“Yeah. I think I get it. I need to figure out who I am and then make friends with people who want to spend time with me for who I am, not because I’m top dog.”

“Exactly. I get tired of seeing people try to use you. You’re a nice person. Oblivious a lot of the time, but nice.”

“What’s oblivious mean again?”

“That you don’t pay attention to what’s going on around you.”

“Right. So you don’t think I notice when people are using me.”

“I don’t know if you notice or not. I just don’t like it when people do it to you.”

“Is that why you went to Rachel’s dad?”

“I went to Rachel’s dad because her behavior was so narcissistic.”

“And that means?”

“Selfish and self-centered to the extreme – not considering at all how her actions might affect anyone else. She uses people.”

“Okay.”

“She wanted you back, but seriously, it had been what? A month after that party at her house when
she had asked Blaine out and hoping that he was bi before she turned to spying on Quinn trying to break the two of you up?"

"Yeah."

"I know it has to feel great to have attractive girls pretty much throwing themselves at you. I’m sure it’s a real ego boost. I’m just tired of seeing you hurt and yanked back and forth. Figure out who you are, like Maggie in the movie had to do. She had to figure out who she was before she could find someone to love her for who she was. Don’t let girls use you, Finn. You’re worth more than that. And playing them off of each other so that you get more attention isn’t nice either. They deserve better too."

"I get it."

"Earlier this winter, Dad told me that when I found the right person, I’d realize what I would have given up by staying with the wrong person."

"Who was the wrong person?"

"Blaine."

"You liked him."

"I did. But it was a lot like my crush on you, with the twist that Blaine was actually gay."

"What do you mean?"

"He was nice to me when we first met."

"Oh."

"Dad talked to me about him later this spring. He took months before he finally deemed me ‘boyfriend’ material. I spent three months becoming a Dalton boy before I was an appropriate choice. I had learned to blend in BEFORE he chose me to sing a duet with at Regionals. He told me that something I sang ‘moved him’ and that singing a duet with me was a way to spend more time with him. I had quit focusing on him and he thrives on being the center of attention. Dad said he was ‘grooming’ me, which sounded really sinister."

"What did he mean?"

"He was guiding me to become the kind of boyfriend he wanted. I kind of see that in Rachel. She has never taken an interested anything you like. She just expects you to do what she likes."

"Quinn was like that too."

"I never saw Quinn badger you like Rachel did."

"She just did it when no one was watching. The pressure about being Prom King and Queen was nuts."

"I can see that, but overall I think Quinn was more passive/aggressive."

"What does that mean? Wait. Is that when I have to, like, guess what she wants and if I don’t get it right, she gets mad?"

"It can be. I can also be when you say what you want to do and the other person says nothing, but
goes ahead with their own plans and acts like you had agreed to do what they wanted. Passive/aggressive people are hard to deal with because they’re not very predictable, but in the end badgering or passive/aggressiveness usually has the same effect – you do what the other person wants, not the other way around. Did either one of them ever go to a movie that you chose? Did they go to a restaurant that you chose? Did they ever go shoot hoops or toss a football around with you?”

Finn laughed.

“That’s what I mean, Finn. They weren’t interested in you as a person. When you meet someone who likes you for who you are, she’ll do things like that with you. Not necessarily in a competitive way, but for fun – because you like to do it and it makes you happy.”

“That thing you said Burt said about realizing what you would have given up, do you feel like that with Sam?”

“I do.”

“Are you in love with him? You said you loved him when we were talking on the way here.”

“I am. He’s amazing.”

“That’s good. I’m sorry about what I did in the fall. That was really selfish of me and I should have just let him sing with you if he wanted to. I feel like it’s my fault you went to Dalton because Sam would have defended you and you would have stayed. I should have defended you, but I like being top dog. I’m starting to realize that what did you called it obvilus…”

“Oblivious.”

“Right. That being oblivious may not explain how I am as much as self-centered. I like being the center of attention. And I like not having to do anything to keep my position as top dog other than to play sports, which I already like to do. I’m not a mean person, but I’m not kind in the way you thought I was. I’m just in the middle. Not really supportive, but not … what’s the opposite?”

“Opressive.”

“Right. Not really supportive, but not oppressive. I don’t stand up for people being bullied, but I don’t really bully them myself. Standing up for you last fall would have put me at odds with people I want to like me. And I wasn’t willing to do that. So, I don’t deserve some kind of ‘get out of jail free’ card because I was oblivious to what was going on. But afterwards, like when I found out that you had actually been really injured, I got really mad at the guys who had done it, but then I had to think about how I hadn’t really done anything to stop it and that made me… there’s a word…”

“Complicit.”

“Hmm. Never heard that one.”

“It means being part of the problem.”

“That’s what I mean.”

“Okay. Since I didn’t do anything to stop it, I was part of the problem.”

“Some good things happened because I went to Dalton. Sometimes bad things happen, and out of those bad things something good ends up happening. I don’t blame you for me going to Dalton, so please stop blaming yourself. I learned a lot there – a lot more than I’m willing to try to explain tonight. Just trust me, okay?”
“Alright.”

“I don’t want you to feel like I think I know more than you in a stuck up, I’m-better-than-you way. Okay?”

“I do feel dumb compared to you though. You know so much about so many things.”

“I think you brought that on yourself in a way by not studying as hard as I have, but a lot of it is the school’s fault as well. The teachers let you get by with sub-par work and you still get C’s. The football team rules the school. You took the mostly the same classes I did until I went to Dalton, but you didn’t actually learn the material. You might have memorized the right math formula for a test you had to take, but you didn’t actually learn the concepts. You memorized facts the day before an exam, but you didn’t actually learn the material. Instead of going home and studying, you went out and did stuff. You had friends. You had people over. I had nothing, Finn. Even after Glee started, everyone in the group was nice enough at school, but we weren’t hanging out afterwards much. Sure, I went shopping occasionally with some of the girls, but I was home alone a lot. I actually LEARNED all of the stuff we were supposed to know. You can learn it too. It just has to matter to you. Once it matters, you’ll be able to see the point in spending time to learn it. I don’t think I’m better than you. I think our lives were so opposite that the outcomes were just as opposite.”

“I get that. Or at least I’m starting to. Let’s go back inside. It’s starting to sprinkle.”

“Where’s Sam?” Kurt asked when he walked into the living room.

“Oh, he was down here for a little while and they he said that he felt grimy and went up to shower and put his pajamas on,” Carole answered.

“That’s what I want to do too. Riding horses and 4-wheelers leaves you grimy, like he said. I think I’m going to go to bed afterwards. I’m really tired. Thanks for letting Jeff and Nick come and stay. We all had a great time today.”

Aunt Eunice responded, “You’re welcome, honey. I’m glad you and your friends had fun.”

“Good night.”

As Kurt started to head up, Finn came traipsing down the stairs and plopped down on the floor in front of the TV. He put a DVD in that he had brought with him.

Kurt and Sam were lying in bed together laughing quietly.

“That was very sneaky of you dragging me BACK into the shower with you.”

Kurt kissed him. “I’ve gotten spoiled at home.”

“Me too.”

“Thanks for inviting Nick and Jeff. I had fun. Did you?”

“I did. They’re really funny.”

“I didn’t know they had such silly sides from spending all of our time at Dalton being proper prep school boys.”
“How do you want to sleep?”

“It’s kind of warm in here. Let’s fold the comforter up and put it on the dresser and just sleep under the sheet so we can still snuggle.”

“Good plan.”

Kurt folded it up and moved it off the bed. He slipped under the sheet. He lay back down facing Sam and started kissing him.

“How is this sleeping?” Sam asked between kisses.

“I recall telling them that I was ready to go to bed. I never mentioned that I was ready to sleep.”

“More trickery, I see.” Sam tickled him.

“More snuggles for my snugglepus or is it snuggle bear?”

“Mmm.” Sam wrapped his arm around Kurt and put his leg over the top of Kurt’s and pulled him closer. “There.”

“Comfy?”

“Not to sleep, but to kiss, definitely.”

Kurt kissed him and pulled back.

“Now you’re just teasing me.”

“No, I just remembered something I need to tell you.”

“What?”

“Finn apologized for last fall. He actually told me that he was sorry.”

“Well, I’ll have to go look at those pigs in the morning and see if they sprouted wings this evening.”

Kurt poked him, but not hard. “Be nice.”

“He didn’t apologize to me yet. So, we’ll see.”

“You know what?”

“What?”

“I love you.” Kurt kissed him passionately. Once they caught their breath, Kurt said, “Thank you.”

“I love you too. What are you thanking me for?”

“For making my birthday really fun.”

“My pleasure, entirely. I love to see you having fun.”

“Are you going to watch the race tomorrow with Dad and Finn?”

“Nah. Maybe the last 5-10 minutes, if we’re in the house. Watching people drive around in circles isn’t really exciting to me. The last few minutes is usually exciting, but that’s it.”
“So, what do you want to do?”

“Well, it’s supposed to be a vacation, right?”

“Yeah.”

“So, let’s just lie in bed and listen to that book and snuggle while they watch the race.”

“You’re sure? I don’t want this to be one of those things where you’re just telling me what you think I want to hear.”

“I told you I wouldn’t do that, didn’t I?”

“You did. I’m sorry. It’s just hard for me to believe that you’d rather lie around in bed listening to a book about mice and woodland creatures than to go do something manly like watch the Indy 500.”

“Who said that lying in bed with my gorgeous boyfriend listening to an epic adventure isn’t manly?”

“Umm. Everyone?”

Sam kissed him. “What do they know?”

Kurt laughed. “I packed one of your movies and one of my movies too. We can watch those at some point if we finish the book.”

“If we do, I still want to watch them in here, lying in bed holding you close.”

“Snuggle Sunday.”

“Sounds perfect.”

Kurt gave him another quick kiss and managed to get turned over and scooted back against him.

“Mmm.” Sam kissed him on the shoulder. “I love you.”

“I love you too.” Kurt kissed Sam’s knuckles and they were asleep a few minutes later.

“Brian Jacques is like a painter with words and he does the most awesome voices. I am supremely jealous that he can do so many different ones and keep them all sorted in his mind.”

“So I take it that you like it so far?”

“It’s awesome. And it’s even better with you lying in my arms while we listen to it together.”

“So, why did you not put the next disc in?”

“Because it’s a kissing intermission.”

“I see. I’m certain that I have never heard of a kissing intermission. You’ll have to explain to me what happens during one.”

“Well, the kisser kisses the kissee. And once the kissee begins to kiss back, he becomes a kisser as well. And then both kissers keep kissing.”

Kurt was laughing silently. He’s adorable. I have the most adorable boyfriend ever. “I bet you can’t
say that three times fast.”

“Don’t need to.” He started kissing Kurt, who wrapped his hand around the back of Sam’s neck and ran his fingers through Sam’s hair.

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“Let’s go for a walk,” Kurt said as he stretched out and lay flat on his back.

“A walk?”

“Yeah. I love the all-day snugglefest idea, but we’ve been in this bed for 20 of the last 24 hours. We even ate brunch in here, just grabbing the banana bread from your duffle. I know we were sleeping for 10 hours of it, but I need to move or I’m never going to be tired enough to sleep in a few hours.”

Sam sat up and held his hand out to Kurt. “Shall we then, my good sir?”

Kurt reached for his hand and let Sam pull him up. “Yes.” He climbed over and straddled Sam’s lap and kissed him.

Sam laughed. “I’m not sure that you really want to get up.”

“I do, but you were just sitting there all kissable.”

“Is that so?”

“It is.”

After a brief make-out, they finally put on t-shirts, shorts, and their shoes and headed outside.

“So, what did you think of the book?”

Sam wrapped his arm around Kurt’s waist. “I loved it. Really it’s so much fun. Are there more? Or is it the only one?”

“I think there’s over 20.” He followed Sam’s lead and wrapped his arm around Sam’s waist.

“Wow. That’s amazing that one person could come up with that many stories. Are they all as good as the first one?”

“All of the ones I’ve read have been. I had never listened to one of them before. I like the character voices. Maybe we can listen to all of them eventually.”

“I’m all for Snuggle Sunday becoming a tradition.”

Kurt stopped and that caused Sam to stop too. He wrapped his other arm around Sam and stepped close and kissed him. “I’m pretty sure that you are for all for snuggles every day.”

Sam kissed down Kurt’s neck. “That’s true.” He kissed his way back up Kurt’s neck and down his jaw line until he reached his lips. He wrapped his hand around the back of Kurt’s neck gently holding him in place. His heart was beating fast. He took Kurt’s hand and put it against his chest so he could feel it. “Feel that?”

Kurt nodded. “Mmm hmm.”

“You’re so sexy. God, you drive me crazy. I just want to touch you all the time.”
I want that to be true, but… He froze.

“Kurt?” Sam sounded distressed. “Are you okay?”

“I don’t know. It feels too perfect.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean this all feels surreal. Standing in the woods with a gorgeous guy who is kissing me and telling me that I’m sexy? I feel like I’m having some kind of hallucination. Maybe Puck made something else with pot in and tricked me into eating it. Or I’m in the hospital in a coma and I’m high on painkillers.”

Sam pulled him close again. He wrapped both of his arms around Kurt and held him close. “I hate that you’ve been hurt so much that you can’t see how amazing you are. I’ll just keep telling you until you believe it.” He loosened his grip and stepped back a bit. “Look me in the eyes.” He waited. “That’s better.” He put his index finger under Kurt’s chin and held his gaze. “I love you so much. I know that’s hard for you to believe, but it’s true. This is real. How I feel about you is real.”

Kurt nodded. “I do believe you. I think it’s the whole situation. Being here in the woods is so different. There’s been so much stress and we’ve mostly only been able to see each other on weekends. Even during spring break we worked all day every day. Now, it’s been four days in a row. And Finn is coming around. And Carole’s aunt is nice to me and you. And Dave isn’t a threat anymore. And Rachel apologized. And Nick and Jeff drove all the way over here. And we went to museums and a deli and a park and held hands and no one said anything mean to us. And you love me. And it’s all just overwhelmingly amazing.”

“Well, that we can agree on. All of this with you is overwhelmingly amazing. I’ve never felt like I could be myself around anyone like I can with you. I know what I want to do when we get back home.” He hugged Kurt and then stepped back and took hold of his hand and started walking back toward the house.

“What’s that?”

“I want to buy our tickets for Comic Con. And then I want us to start working on our outfits.”

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When they went back in the house, Aunt Eunice was nowhere to be seen. Burt, Carole, and Finn were watching a movie, which had at least 30 minutes left before it would be over.

After they made a couple of sandwiches and put them on paper towels, Kurt and Sam headed upstairs. They left the sandwiches in the bedroom, grabbed their pajamas, and went into the bathroom together.

“They’re too busy watching that movie to pay any attention. We’ll still turn the water off for a few minutes in the middle, just to be safe.”

The two of them undressed and got in the shower. They enjoyed kissing, using soap for an additional purpose, washing each other’s hair, more kissing, and after the break, they swapped places for a second round that involved no soap. They got out and dried off. They put their pajama pants on not a moment too soon because there was a light knock on the door.

“Uh huh?” Kurt said.
“You about done in there?”

“Yeah. Juf brufing my teef.”

“Alright. Just hurry up. I gotta go.”

A couple of minutes later, Kurt opened the door and let Sam get back to their room before he knocked gently on Finn’s door. “All yours.”

Finn opened the door. “Thanks, dude. Where did you two vanish to?”

“Went for a walk in the woods.”

“Cool. We’re leaving early. Burt’s getting us up.”

“You’re coming fishing?”

“You don’t want me to?”

“Oh, no. I do want you to. I just figured we’d never get you up early enough to go.”

“Well, Mom said she’d make us all breakfast and a second breakfast to take with us. I gotta go. See you in the morning.” He dashed into the bathroom.

The next morning, the four guys were in the Navigator heading to the lake right before dawn. They set up the chairs and got the poles ready to use. They put hooks on, baited them, and spread out along the lake edge to cast. After about an hour, they weren’t having much luck, so they decided to move down to another area of the lake. After an hour in the new location, they had caught a few small fish that they tossed back. They took a break and ate the breakfast sandwiches that Carole had packed for them and went back to fishing. They switched their lures once they figured out what was working the best and they began to do a lot better. They caught quite a few decent sized fish by 10:30 and headed back to the farm.

Burt took the fish around back and hosed them down and started prepping them for lunch while Kurt and Sam helped in the kitchen. Finn started the grill up and started seasoning the meat.

By noon everything was ready and Burt and Finn were manning the grill. Kurt and Sam were finishing up frosting the ice cream cake they had made. Aunt Eunice and Carole got the picnic tablecloth out and started setting everything out on the table. Kurt put the cake in the freezer, and then carried the paper plates, napkins, and cups outside. Sam took the drinks out.

Everyone sat at the table waiting for the platter of grilled meats and once they were on the table, they all started passing food and filling their plates.

“We are good cooks, if I say so myself,” Kurt said.

“I agree, honey. Everything is really good.”

“What dessert did you two make?” Finn asked.

“Ice cream cake,” Sam answered.

“What kind?” Finn asked as he took another huge bite of his hamburger.
“Chocolate cake, mint chocolate chip ice cream,” Kurt said.

“Sounds good.”

“We’ll leave the leftovers here for you.”

“Thanks, dude.” Finn stuffed the last bit of the burger in his mouth.

Kurt just shook his head and smiled. “You’re welcome.”

After they ate, Kurt went upstairs. A few minutes later Sam followed him upstairs and into the bedroom.

“You weren’t going to do that all by yourself were you?” Sam asked as he wrapped his arms around Kurt’s waist from behind.

“Well, I haven’t forgotten how, you know,” Kurt teased back.

Sam slipped his hands under the front of Kurt’s shirt. “But what if I have?”

“Then let’s get in there before someone comes up asking questions.”

“They’re all busy discussing the details of Finn’s responsibilities and obligations.”

“Grab something to put on and come on then.”

They got in the shower together and showered quickly with only a few kisses. They put shorts on and went back into the bedroom and packed up all of their stuff and finished getting dressed. They carried their bags to the Navigator and put them in the back and went back inside the house.

“We’ll come back and visit,” Carole told Aunt Eunice. She went upstairs and grabbed her bags. Burt came down the stairs behind her.

Kurt and Sam gave Aunt Eunice a hug.

“Thanks for having us. We had a great time,” Kurt said.

“You’re welcome to come back any time,” she said.

“Thanks,” Sam said.

Finn followed the four of them out to the Navigator. Everyone hugged him before they got in.

“Remember that you’re here to help, not make things harder. Keep your stuff upstairs in your room. Do your laundry. Help with the dishes.”

“I got it, Mom. I’ll go to work on time. Help with the farm. Go to algebra lessons. I know, I know. I have to grow up and be responsible. I’m going to be 18 in a couple of months.”

Carole gave him another hug. “I love you. I’m going to miss you, but this is the best way to get that debt off your back.”

“I know, Mom. I screwed up. I gotta pay the money back. I’ll miss you too.”

She got in the driver’s seat and shut her door. They waved as they headed down the driveway.
“Don’t forget that we need to stop in town so I can returned those library items,” Kurt said.

“I didn’t forget, honey.”

She drove straight to the library and Kurt got out and put the items in the dropbox since the library was close for Memorial Day. As soon as he was buckled up, she drove out to the highway to head back to Lima.

After they emptied everything out of the Navigator, they carried their bags to the laundry room and dumped all of their clothes in the washer before going up to their room.

Kurt texted Jeff to figure out where they could meet the next morning.

“Okay. So, we’re going to meet them at this doctor’s office that’s about two blocks east off 75 on State Road 12. Jeff said they got permission to park in the spot farthest from the building that no one ever parks in.”

“That will save time since it’s so close to the highway and it’s not in a big crowded retail area like where Cracker Barrel is. What time are we meeting them?”

“Tomorrow, we’re going to meet a half-hour early since were not certain about the parking and whether they have paperwork for us to fill out. So, we’re meeting at 7:00.”

“That’s early.” He grabbed Kurt and tossed him on the bed and pinned him. And kissed his neck. “That’s going to seriously cut into my morning cuddles.”

Kurt flipped their positions. “We can go to bed earlier and cuddle more then.” He kissed Sam.

“That’s snuggling.” He flipped them back. “I’ll miss my cuddles.” He started to tickle Kurt. Then, he lay down on top of him and put his head on Kurt’s shoulder and he pretended to whine like a little kid. “Camp is stealing my cuddles.” Then he faked crying by breathing raggedly.

“You big faker.” Kurt flipped them again and tickled Sam instead. He stopped and leaned down and kissed him. “And what’s the difference between snuggles and cuddles?”

“For me, snuggles start out just close, like when you want to go to sleep. You can even snuggle a pillow or a blanket. But cuddles, those are when you’re all tangled up with someone who is relaxed and cozy, like we are in the mornings. I’ve never cuddled anyone but you. I’ve snuggled my brother and sister. You and I have snuggled when other people were around, like on my birthday in the chair in the family room. But I wouldn’t cuddle with you around other people. It’s more private and intimate.”

“Hmm. Interesting distinction. I’ve only ever snuggled and cuddled with you, so I guess I never thought about the difference. We’ll start going to bed earlier to snuggle, so that we’ll wake up earlier and have more time to enjoy our cuddling before we have to get out of bed.”

“I’m willing to give your idea a try.”

Kurt flipped their positions again and started kissing along Sam’s shoulder and up his neck. “I’m sure you are. It gets me in the bed with you, which you seem to be quite fond of.”

“Mmm hmm.” Sam slipped his hands up under Kurt’s t-shirt and ran them along Kurt’s sides. He scooted Kurt back enough that he could sit up with Kurt on his lap. He held Kurt close and began
kissing down his neck. “I say we finish our laundry, help with dinner, eat, and claim exhaustion. We come back up, shower, and get in bed.”

“Good plan.”

At dinner, Burt asked about the camps. “So, Nick and Jeff are going to the camps with you two?”

“Yes. We’re meeting them in Findlay and then riding up together. We’ll switch off who drives from Findlay to Toledo to split the cost of the gas. Nick’s going to the theater camp with me and Jeff is going to the glass blowing camp with Sam.”

“You two weren’t around when they were there on Saturday, and then I just didn’t think about it again until now. They said it was fine to tell the two of you that they’re a couple. They’ve been together for two years, but I only found out last Tuesday. They’ve decided not to date secretly at school anymore though, so when they go back, they’ll be out.”

“I guess I didn’t realize that even in a school with a No Bullying policy that the students would keep the fact that they were dating a secret,” Carole said.

“Just because the school doesn’t allow bullying doesn’t keep the parents of the kids from disowning their own kids or cutting off social interaction with the families of gay kids. I guess I never told you specifically. I had to quit eating breakfast alone with one particular Warbler because I never said who I was dating before Sam was outed. So since my boyfriend was a secret, some people began to assume that the Warbler I was eating with was my secret boyfriend. His father is homophobic and he would be disowned if he were gay.”

“Some people are just nuts,” she said. “He couldn’t eat with you in a public cafeteria because you are openly gay and he was afraid that the kids MIGHT tell their fathers that he was dating you? Poor kid.”

“Everyone thinks rich kids have it easy. That’s one thing I learned at Dalton that wasn’t part of the curriculum. Jerks and homophobes aren’t limited to a particular socioeconomic group. And being disowned when you’re poor isn’t nearly as hard as it is to be disowned when you’re rich and can’t get any financial aid for college because your parents have 10 million dollars, but won’t give you a single cent.”

“That’s really terrible. I mean disowning a child for their sexuality is terrible, but when they can’t get any financial aid for college, that’s really hard.”

“Some of them tried to explain to me how they’ve had a 25-year life plan since the day they were born. The preschool they would attend, the private elementary school, junior high, and finally Dalton for high school. A lot of them have their career chosen for them and they have to study and attend the college of their parents’ choice or they get no help with college expenses.”

“Wow.”

“Not all of them are like that, but for a lot of them they have limited selections of careers. One guy I knew wants to be an orchestra conductor, but his father expects him to become a doctor. He just finished his sophomore year and he desperately wants to figure out how not to have to study medicine, but he hasn’t yet.”

“That would explain the lack of bedside manner in some doctors. People forced into a career that is so emotionally taxing when it isn’t what they wanted to do,” Carole commented.
“Yeah. Quite a few talked about how they were just pieces on a game board in a way. They were
born, raised by nannies, shipped off to boarding schools, and then required to become whatever their
fathers choose for them. It’s insane and sad.”

“I get the impression that Nick and Jeff’s parents aren’t like that,” Burt said

“They aren’t. They’re not old money. They could afford to send Nick and Jeff to Dalton and they
didn’t want them to face any bullying at a public school in Findlay. But the two of them are free to
study whatever they want.”

“That’s good.”

“We’re meeting them early tomorrow morning since we’re not really sure of the parking and we
don’t want to be late on the first day. We’re going to finish up our laundry, maybe watch a movie in
our room, and go to sleep early.”

“That’s fine. I’ll see you both at the shop tomorrow afternoon when you get back.”

Kurt got up and started clearing the food from the table and packing it up to store it. Sam followed
him with the plates and loaded the dishwasher. Kurt washed the pots and pans and Sam dried them
and put them away. They waited the last five minutes for their laundry to dry, grabbed it and headed
upstairs.

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When they were finally in bed, Kurt popped back up to grab something, and came back.

“Can I give you a massage?”

“Always, anytime. I love your hands all over me.”

Sam scooted over enough that Kurt could straddle him. He rubbed a very small amount of lotion into
Sam’s shoulders and worked the knots out. He moved down and worked the whole length of his
spine. After a few minutes, Kurt splayed out and lay down on top of him. He pulled his arms in and
slid his hands under Sam’s arms so he could hold some of his own weight. He kissed along Sam’s
shoulders and neck. He softly spoke in Sam’s ear, “I had a lot of fun with you this weekend. I’ve
never had a friend that just wanted to spend time with me. It’s awesome. You’re awesome. I love
you.”

“Well, the feeling is mutual. I had a lot of fun too. I always do when we’re together. I love you too.
Let’s get comfortable and rearrange somehow so we can kiss.”

“Mmm.” Kurt placed small kissed along Sam’s neck, shoulder, and down his arm as he moved to his
side of the bed so Sam could turn on his side. He lay back down and scooted nearly flush with Sam
and started kissing down his jaw.

Sam ran his hand down Kurt’s side and slipped it around his waist to keep him close and met Kurt’s
kisses moving just slightly to align their lips. They were still pretty spent from their shower and their
kisses were slow and warm – just enjoying their closeness. They fell asleep holding each other.
Chapter 16

Kurt set the alarm for 15 minutes earlier than they needed to get out of bed. The sound caused Sam to stir a little, but he would have just fallen right back asleep if it hadn’t been for Kurt wrapping himself all around him.

“Mmm.” Sam ran his hand along Kurt’s arm and kissed the top of his head.

“Good morning, sleepyhead.”

“S’too early t’get up.”

“It’s cuddle time. We’ll get up in 10 minutes.”

“M’kay.” He pulled Kurt closer. “I love you.” He wiggled until he managed to get Kurt to lie on top of him. “Better.”

Kurt laughed. “I love you too. You want to be my personal mattress this morning?”

“Mmm hmm. Want you as close as possible.” He ran his hands up and down Kurt’s back.

“That feels good.”

“You feel good. So soft’n cuddly.”

*God, he’s adorable.*

Sam ran his hands lower with a little more pressure, causing some friction in between them.

“You starting something or just rearranging me a bit?”

“Either? Both?”

Kurt rearranged himself a bit and then rolled his hips.

They barely made it out of the house on time with the cooler and their work shoes for later. They met up with Nick and Jeff at the appointed time. The two of them climbed in the backseat and Kurt drove back out to the highway heading to Toledo.

“So, you’ve had us curious. Are you willing to tell us what you meant by getting outed as a bisexual when you’re gay?”

Sam told them pretty much everything that had happened since his dad had lost his job.

“Wow. That’s nuts. And you want to go back there to school next year?” Jeff asked Kurt.

“Yes and no. I like being in Glee. Some of the teachers are okay. I’m sure that graduating from Dalton would look much better to Ivy League and big name schools, but it’s just too expensive. The school district eventually paid my costs this year, but they won’t next year. And the threat is no longer a problem, so there’s no reason for me not go to McKinley. We’re only going to go for two
classes anyway. We’re taking four classes at OSU Lima.”

“Well, that’s good,” Nick said.

Kurt pulled over in the pick up/drop off area in front of a theater building. Kurt flipped his flashers on. He and Nick got out. Kurt opened the back and grabbed his lunch and shut it back.

Sam was standing at the back and pulled Kurt into a hug and kissed him. “I love you. I’ll see you later. Have fun.”

“You too. I love you too.” He stepped back.

Sam winked at him and walked up the side to get in the driver’s seat. Jeff hopped in the front seat. They left to go to the museum.

Kurt caught up to Nick who was waiting for him on the sidewalk. “I’m nervous. And excited.”

“I’m just mostly nervous. Let’s get inside and see what we’re going to be doing.”

“Getting here was a little bit of backtracking, but I think it will save time overall because they won’t have to look for a spot on the street or end up giving up and having to pay to park in a lot near the theater. I’ll just park way down here and leave the closer spots for people visiting the museum.” Sam said as he pulled into a spot.

“I think this is going to be really cool. I’m really excited.”

“I think it will be too. Let’s get in there. Hopefully, they don’t have paperwork to fill out.”

Kurt and Nick sat down together in the auditorium. At 8:30, Eric Grayson, the camp director got up and introduced himself and his assistant, Tammy Rogers. He gave them a little history of the camp and the theater.

“I know everyone is excited to find out what musical we’re doing this summer, so without further ado… We’ll be performing West Side Story. I’m passing around two sign up sheets. Only sign up once. The two sheets are just to make this go faster. Attached to the sheets are the main roles in the musical for anyone not familiar with it. As with all of our summer camp productions, the main roles will go to the high school students, with preference given to the juniors and seniors. That doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t try for a main role if you’re a freshman or sophomore. We have cast main roles with younger high school students before. We have to find people who fit the criteria listed for the roles. Please be mindful that if a role says ‘strong dance background’ you shouldn’t audition for that role if you don’t know your left foot from your right foot. Also, the vocal range is listed as well. If there are any high school students who do not know their vocal range, you can follow Tammy out to one of the practice rooms and she can help you figure that out while the sign up sheet is being passed around. Do not audition for parts that are outside your vocal range. Everyone auditioning for the same role will audition with the same song. This will speed up the casting process.” He handed out two clipboards with pencils attached. “Anyone needing Tammy’s assistance can get up and go with her now.”

Four people got up and followed her.

“Which part are you going to audition for?” Nick asked quietly.
“Tony and Baby John I guess. I don’t think I have the right voice for the other parts.”

“What about you?”

“I don’t know the musical well enough to know. I’ll look at the choices when the clipboard gets to me.”

Kurt let Nick look at the roles and sign up first. He marked Riff and Chino. Kurt marked Tony and Baby John, like he had said. After about a half-hour the clipboards had made it through all of the camp participants.

“Now that everyone has signed up to audition, you all need to come up and grab the audition sheet for the role you most want. Just line up and walk past the stage and take your sheets and sit back down. I’ll give everyone 10 minutes or so to look through the music and the monologue to present. I’ll lay the clipboards up here. If you want to change your mind, you can bring the character sheet back, select a different character and change what you wrote on the sign up sheet. Everyone auditioning for a main role will do so Thursday morning. That will give you two evenings to work on your song. We’ll post the cast list Friday. In 15 minutes, we’ll start with vocal warm ups and some fun ice breakers.”

By lunchtime, Jeff and Sam had been through all of the safety training they needed to use the equipment in the glass blowing studio. After they ate lunch, they toured the glass art section of the museum. Jeff and Sam walked around together, talking and getting to know each other a little better. After an hour or so in the museum, they went back to the studio and they got to try out using the equipment.

On their way back to the Nav, Sam asked, “So, what did you think? You said you’ve never taken any art classes before.”

“I loved it. I think it’s really amazing. But it’s pretty intimidating. My first attempt was pretty bad this afternoon.”

“Honestly, I think it just takes a little time. It’s completely different from any other kind of art I’ve done. I think figuring out exactly how to move your fingers to get the desired speed and figuring out exactly when to blow and how much air pressure to get the results we want just takes practice. Just have fun and relax.”

Sam unlocked the doors and they got in. He pulled out of the lot and drove back to the theater.

“I’m sure you’re right. They’re very fine motor movements and I’m sure it’s like learning to write. None of us were very good to start with and we all got better, but only certain people can do calligraphy. It remains to be seen whether I will be able to make anything decent.”

Sam laughed. “Even if you don’t, it’s okay. There’s one thing with glass blowing that different from other art forms. Whatever it is when you’re done, no one will know what it was supposed to be. It’s not like someone will say, ‘That is the ugliest horse I’ve ever seen when you painted a dog.’ Glass art is different. As long as it is pretty, people will like it.”

Jeff laughed. “I suppose so. I wonder if Nick had any fun. He’s doing it for the boost he needs to be a more confident public speaker, but he was really nervous. He has no problem singing a solo or dancing in front of people, but public speaking really bothers him. He’s hoping that he’ll learn better voice control and projection and stuff.”
“Kurt’s hoping to get a big part. McKinley didn’t have a fall musical the last three years. There’s no way to be sure that we’ll have one this fall.”

“I remember. Rocky Horror was a bad choice for sure.” Jeff laughed.

It didn’t take long to get back to the theater. Sam pulled up into the loading zone and Nick and Kurt got in the back seat.

All four of them talked about their day on the way back to Findlay. When they got to Nick’s car, Kurt got out when Nick and Jeff did, grabbed the snacks he had packed, and moved up to the passenger seat. They waved as they drove away.

Sam drove straight from Findlay to the shop. They arrived in time to change and get started at 3:30. They were scheduled to work until 8:00.

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Once they got off, they headed home. Carole had a casserole in the oven on warm waiting for them when they got there. Kurt pulled it out. Sam grabbed plates and held them while Kurt dished out their servings. He carried them into the dining room. Kurt brought silverware and glasses of water and sat down.

“I’m already tired. I’m not sure that this was a great idea. Camp five days a week, working six days a week – I think we may need to reconsider and mark some days off. We wanted to go camping and the state park is up near where we’re going to the day camps. It would make more sense to just stay on a Friday afternoon and spend Friday and Saturday night.”

“That’s true. I think we’re going to have to get used to going to sleep earlier, but I have to study this week. I’m not working this Friday and Saturday because I have to retake those OGTs.”

“I’m going to help you study. I really want you to pass.”

“Me too. I think I will. I actually learned the stuff in Algebra 2 after you started helping me. I think the math part will go a lot better this time. And I’m getting extra time, so the writing portion shouldn’t be as stressful.”

“I’m going to ask for Friday off.” He leaned toward Sam and kissed him. “I’ll be right back.”

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Kurt found Burt in the family room. “Hey, Dad, I need to talk to you.”

“Yeah sure, kiddo. What’s up?” Burt pressed pause on the remote.

“I need Friday off this week. Sam has to retake those state tests this Saturday. I want to help him review Friday evening. If he doesn’t pass, he has just one last chance in November to be able to graduate on time. I’ll work all day Saturday, even after the shop closes to make up the hours.”

“That’s fine. School comes before the shop. I know you’re both trying to save up, but if he doesn’t graduate, there’s not much to be saving up for.”

“Exactly.”

“How was that camp?”

“We’re doing West Side Story. Auditions are Thursday morning. The cast list will go up Friday.”
“So, there’ll be a show at the end?”

“Yes.”

“Be sure to get me and Carole a ticket.”

“I will. We’d like a couple of other Saturdays off at some point too. We want to go camping and a few other things.”

“Sure. You know how to give yourself days off. Just do it soon, so I can adjust the schedule if I need to.”

“Thanks.”

“Everything with you and Sam okay?”

“Yep. Great. He’s super sweet.”

“You’re a lot happier now. I like that.”

“Me too. He’s waiting on me and my dinner’s getting cold.”

Burt nodded and pressed play on the remote.

Kurt ran back upstairs and walked into the dining room, wrapped his arms around Sam’s neck and leaned over him and gave him a kiss on the cheek. “It’s all set.” He let go of Sam and slid into his chair and started eating. Once they finished, they put their stuff in the dishwasher.

Since Finn wasn’t home, Sam went in his room and sat at his desk and started reviewing for the math OGT. Kurt pulled his keyboard out and worked on “Maria” for his audition. After an hour of review, Sam went back to their bedroom. He shut and locked the door behind him. He put his review sheets on the shelf.

“Sounds good. Really good.” He walked up and wrapped his arms around Kurt from behind and kissed him on the back of the neck.

“Thanks. I’ve never heard any of the other guys there sing, except Nick and he’s not auditioning for Tony. So, I have no idea what my chances are of getting the part. We just sang as a group today. We sang through some of the group numbers and just sight-sang some choral pieces. We did a little improv. It was fun.”

“The glass blowing was super cool.” He still had his arms around Kurt and started kissing up his neck again. He moved his hands up Kurt’s chest and started unbuttoning his shirt.

“I bet.”

He scooted even closer and licked the edge of Kurt’s ear. “I can think of something else I’d like to bl”

Kurt turned, quickly pulled Sam’s t-shirt off, and started kissing him while unfastening his pants. Sam slid Kurt’s shirt off his shoulders. They undressed each other and kissed all the way to the shower.
Thursday morning, Nick and Kurt headed into the theater. They took their seats, but after a brief welcome, a few instructions, and vocal warm ups, everyone except the four guys that were auditioning for Tony followed Tammy out of the auditorium so the auditions could begin. Kurt auditioned third out of the four. He thought the other three had all done a good job and he had no idea who would be chosen. Once they had all finished, they were escorted out and the next group was brought in. The auditions took until lunchtime.

They broke for lunch and Nick and Kurt sat together and spoke quietly.

“I’m so nervous,” Kurt said. “The other three guys were good.”

“Yeah, the other two guys I auditioned against were really good too. It’s nerve-wracking to wait. I’m glad we don’t have to wait a long time.”

Tammy approached Kurt. “We’d like you to come to the auditorium at the end of lunch.”

Kurt nodded and smiled. “Sure.”

After she walked away, Kurt said, “Now, I’m even more nervous.”

“I think it’s probably a good sign. Maybe they’ve narrowed it down to you and just one other guy.”

“I guess we’ll see.”

“Kurt, we’d like you to sing ‘One Hand, One Heart’ with Emily. We know that you haven’t had time to prepare and you are welcome to use the sheet music.”

“Alright.” Kurt took the music he was offered and walked up onto the stage to stand with Emily. He looked it over just to be sure, even though he was quite familiar with the scene and the song.

“I, Anton, take thee Maria…”

“I, Maria, take thee Anton…”

From there they sang through the whole song. When they finished, Tammy said, “Please start again and go through it one more time now that you’ve had a chance to go through it, but wait until Eric comes in.”

Emily and Kurt talked to each other quietly about the beginning and how to do the scene with no props. When they heard the auditorium door open, they quit talking and waited for Eric to take his seat. Once he was ready, they ran through the piece again.

Eric said, “Thank you, Kurt. You can go back with everyone else.”

Kurt nodded and left the auditorium.

When they dropped Nick and Jeff off in Findlay that afternoon, Kurt asked if they could stay in Toledo for a little while after camp the next day. They agreed, but Kurt wouldn’t tell them why.
That night in bed, Sam asked, “Are you going to tell me why we’re staying in Toledo tomorrow?”

“Nope. It’s a surprise.”

He kissed up Kurt’s neck, and then spoke very quietly directly into his ear. “Not even a hint?”

Kurt shuttered a bit from the warm air and lips nearly on his ear. *He’s tricky. Hold firm. You can resist.* “Nope. No hints.”

Sam didn’t quit kissing him. He just redirected the kisses down Kurt’s jaw until he reached his lips.  

Sam drove the next morning because Kurt was too wound up to drive. Kurt and Nick went inside and got in line with the other camp attendees and waited to see the cast list. They got to the front of the line and Kurt managed to tamp down the squeal that tried to escape. He had gotten Tony. Nick had gotten Chino.

They stepped away from the cast list and they sent off texts to Jeff and Sam letting them know what roles they had gotten. They went in the auditorium afterwards and started their vocal warm-ups.

Sam pulled up, flipped the blinkers on, got out and leaned against the Navigator waiting for Kurt to come out. As soon as Kurt stepped outside the building, he saw Sam and he practically ran and threw himself into Sam’s arms.

“I’m Tony. I’m Tony.” He kissed Sam. He didn’t even care that the rest of the camp kids were coming out.

Sam pulled him into a hug. “You did it!”

“I did.” He had a huge smile on his face.

Nick came out of the building and Jeff got out of the passenger seat and hugged him when he walked up. “Congratulations! I’ll run lines with you.”

“Thanks.”

Kurt walked around and got in the driver’s seat and everyone else got in. He drove them to his surprise for the afternoon.

When he pulled into the parking lot, he said, “I looked up cool places to go and I found an ice cream shop that has been rated #1 for ages. It’s all homemade and it looked like it would be fun.”

“I’ve never heard of Handel’s, but I love ice cream,” Jeff said. “Sounds great to me.”

They got out and went inside. Kurt and Sam decided to share a banana split. Nick and Jeff opted for the 4-scoop sampler. They picked four flavors they had never heard of before: caramel pretzel crunch, banana nut cake, cherry magnolia, and midnight madness.

They paid and waited for their creations. Nick and Kurt sat facing Jeff and Sam, putting their desserts in the middle of the table.

“Oh, God, this is really good,” Jeff said after he put a bite of the midnight madness in his mouth. “So much chocolate.”
“The banana split is really good,” Kurt said. “I can see why they win the awards for best ice cream.”

They sat and ate the ice cream without talking much because they didn’t want it to melt. Once they had finished, Sam grabbed their trash and tossed it.

“That was definitely delicious. Good find,” Sam said when he sat back down. “And a good way to celebrate you both getting main parts.”

“I agree,” Jeff said.

They got up and headed back out to the parking lot while they continued to talk.

Kurt spent the evening helping Sam prepare for the math portion of the OGTs. Since they were home at dinnertime, they headed down to eat with Burt and Carole. Once everyone was seated, Kurt shared his news.

“I got Tony. That’s the lead role.”

“That’s great, Kurt,” Carole said sweetly.

“Way to go, kiddo. Be sure to get us tickets, like I said.”

“I will. Once I find out for sure when the performances are, I’ll let you know so you can pick which one to go to.”

“Good, good. How’s the studying going?”

“Pretty good. Since I’m going to get more time and I actually understand Algebra now, I think I’ll be fine, but I’m reviewing and practicing. After we eat, I’m going to go take a practice test and see how I do.”

“I’m going to start memorizing my lines while he’s studying. How’s Finn doing?”

Carole answered, “He likes working at the camp. He’s not thrilled about the math lessons. But the fact that he hates them so much just proves to me how much he needs them. He’s complaining because it’s hard.”

“Yeah. If he’s struggling with it so much, I’m surprised that he passed the math part of the OGTs. I didn’t pass the first time. Everyone took them last year, but I wasn’t in Ohio then, so I took them this year, but I didn’t pass all of the parts. That’s why I have to retake them.”

“No one has said anything about him not passing something. I’m going to look through my file of papers from the school. I don’t want anything left to chance since I have little faith in how that school is run.”

“Good idea.”

Once they finished eating, Carole packed the leftovers up for them to have for lunch the next day while Kurt and Sam did the dishes and cleaned up the kitchen.

Kurt started memorizing his lines and Sam took the practice test and graded it. He reviewed a few things that he had missed, and then put his study guide on the alcove shelf next to him. “I don’t think
there is anything else I can review to do any better tomorrow.”

Kurt looked up from his script. “Okay. Are you ready to shower and go to sleep?”

Sam scooted closer and took Kurt’s script and put it on the alcove shelf on Kurt’s side of the bed and then quickly grabbed Kurt’s waist and pulled him down in the bed and started unbuttoning Kurt’s shirt and kissing his chest as he undid each button, until he got to Kurt’s waist and then moved on to divesting Kurt of his shorts. He looked up and made eye contact with Kurt before he went any further. Kurt nodded and Sam proceeded.

“Will you let me draw you again tonight?” Sam asked after finished brushing his teeth.

Kurt was sitting at his vanity right outside the bathroom, but didn’t answer right away.

“It’s okay if you don’t want me to, but sketching relaxes me and you are definitely the most gorgeous model.” Sam leaned over kissed Kurt on the back of the neck.

Even after nearly three months, Kurt was still surprised by Sam’s simple statements of how attractive he found Kurt to be. Kurt blushed. “Okay.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Just tell me what you’d like me to do.”

“Umm.” He turned and adjusted the comforter on the bed so it was neat again. “Just lie on the bed, in the middle so I can sit close to you all the way around while I work on the drawing.”

Kurt moved the pillows around a little so he’d be comfortable in the middle of the bed. Sam set the lighting in the room.

“I don’t know how you have the energy to stay awake to draw me after three rounds in the last, what? Hour, hour and a half?”

“It’s nerves. When I get really nervous, I have a hard time falling asleep.”

Kurt left his towel in the bathroom and lay down on the bed. “You can arrange me however you’d like, but I can’t promise to keep my eyes open.”

“That’s fine.” He kissed Kurt gently and positioned him and started his sketch. He worked on it for about an hour before he put it away in he small hanging file safe with a lock he had bought. He grabbed the blanket Kurt had put away for the summer out of the closet and turned the lights off. He covered Kurt with it instead of waking him up to get under the covers. He lay down and pulled the blanket up to cover himself as well.

Kurt roused a bit, but only enough to scoot and wrap himself all around Sam and fall back asleep. “Love you,” he mumbled.

Sam smiled, “I love you too.” He kissed him on the forehead. He relaxed as he listened to Kurt’s rhythmic breathing, falling asleep much more quickly than he had anticipated.

Kurt managed to get out of bed and get dressed without waking Sam. He went downstairs and made them both breakfast and brought it back upstairs.
“Sam, sweetie, wake up. I have breakfast.”

“Mmm? How’d you get out of bed?”

“I was very sneaky. I wanted to make you breakfast. Sit up. Let’s eat.”

Sam rubbed his eyes and sat up. Kurt put the tray of food on the table. Sam grabbed some boxer briefs on the way to the table. He plopped down in the chair next to Kurt.

“Thank you.” He picked up his fork and started to eat. “You’re really sweet to me.” He leaned towards Kurt and kissed him on the cheek.

“You’re welcome. I wanted you to have a good breakfast before you go take those tests.”

“Well, it’s delicious.” Sam reached over and put his hand on Kurt’s thigh, gently stroking his thumb against Kurt’s skin while he continued to eat. “What time is it?”

“7:00 or so.”

“M’kay. Do I still get cuddles?”

“Yes, sweetie. Finish eating and we can cuddle.”

Less than five minutes later, they were back in bed and Sam was cuddled up on Kurt. At 7:15, Kurt kissed him on the top of the head.

“We have to get up now.”

“Okay.” Sam tipped his head back and scooted up enough to kiss Kurt. “Positive thoughts. I can do this.”

“You can.”

They got out of bed and Sam got dressed. He grabbed his backpack and Kurt grabbed the tray with the plates on it. Once they were in the kitchen, Sam opened the fridge to get their lunches. He put his lunch in his backpack and held on to Kurt’s until he had finished loading the dishwasher, and then handed it to him. Sam dropped Kurt off at the shop and headed to the school.

At 4:30, Sam was back at the shop and Kurt was still working on a car he had been working on for most of the afternoon.

“Long day,” he said as he walked over to Kurt.

“I agree. It’s been a long time since I’ve worked in the shop the whole day. Back at spring break I guess.”

They spoke at the same time.

“How much longer until you’re done?”

“How did it go?”

They laughed.

Sam answered first. “It went better than the last time. I had time to get a lot of the problems done. As long as I did most of them right, I should pass. And being able to type my essay answers for the
writing portion made a big difference. I can type a whole essay faster than I can write one because I don’t have to struggle as much to read it, so I can go over it and find as many mistakes as I can more easily. But there’s no spellcheck or anything, so it was still hard.”

“Well, I know you did your best, which is what counts. And I have about an hour’s worth of work left to do on this car.”

“You know what then? I think I’m going to walk or maybe jog home. I could use the exercise to decompress from all of the stress today. I should get there before you. I’m going to leave my backpack in the backseat.” He stepped towards Kurt and gave him a quick kiss. “I’ll see you at home.”

Kurt left the shop about 5:40. He stuck around to finish up the last bit on the car so it could be picked up Monday morning. He called Sam’s phone, but heard it ring in the back seat. He had left it in his backpack. Hearing it ring made Kurt remember that backpacks, phones, and other personal items weren’t allowed in the testing room. He pulled out of the parking lot and headed home.

When he got there, he went straight up to his room, but Sam wasn’t there. He went back downstairs and even down to the family room and didn’t find him anywhere. He took a peek in Finn’s room when he went back upstairs, just to be certain that he wasn’t in there. He decided to hop in the shower and get started on dinner.

When Sam wasn’t home by 6:30, Kurt started to worry. He turned the oven down to warm and texted Carole to let her know that it was in the oven and he was going to look for Sam.

He drove back to the shop, taking the route he thought would be most likely for Sam to have walked. He didn’t see him along the way. He sat in the shop parking lot for a minute and tried to think of places Sam might have gone. The library was closed, the comic book shop was closed, and he couldn’t come up with anywhere else he might have gone. He pulled out of the lot and started driving home again, going a different route. A few minutes later, he got a text from an unknown caller. He pulled over to open it.

--He’s in the dumpster behind your dad’s shop.

Kurt’s heart dropped. He turned around as quickly as he could and drove back to the shop. He parked next to the dumpster and got out.

“Sam?” he yelled. He looked over the side of the dumpster and Sam was there, but he was unconscious. Kurt called 911. Ten minutes later, paramedics were doing their best to get Sam out of the dumpster. As soon as they got him out, he was in the ambulance and gone. Kurt called Carole and followed the ambulance to the hospital.

Kurt sat in the waiting room with no idea what was happening. When he couldn’t prove that he was family, no one would let him back to see Sam.

Sam, my sweet Sam. Please be okay. Please!

When Carole got there, she made it clear that they would be allowing her back to see Sam. She had some kind of legal document from Hiram with her.

As soon as she had spoken to the triage nurse, she called Kurt.

“He’s going to be okay. He’s banged up pretty bad. He’s going to have couple of x-rays, but he’s
come to. The nurse should be out there for you any time. He’s asking for you.”

Right then, the nurse walked up. “Kurt Hummel?”

Kurt nodded, but responded to Carole. “The nurse is here. I’m on my way back.” When he entered the room, he walked directly to the head of the bed and took Sam’s hand. “Who did this?”

“Some of the guys from school. It came with the message that the school can make rules, but school’s out and I’m not welcome in Lima.”

“Do you want to file a police report?” Carole asked.

“I don’t know. I probably should. Otherwise, they’re just going to keep doing stuff like this.”

Carole nodded to the nurse who was looking into the room. Two officers stepped in.

“Before you ask any questions, you should know that our lawyer’s on his way. It should be less than five minutes before he’s here.”

“Yes, ma’am. We’ll just start with the basic questions.”

Sam had Kurt get his driver’s license out to give to the officers so they could start filling in the report. Hiram arrived just a few minutes later.

“I’m Hiram Berry, Mr. Evans’ attorney.”

The officers introduced themselves as Officers Kellans and Johnson. Before they got any farther with their questions, an orderly came in to take Sam to get the x-rays.

“Sorry about this,” he said. “I’ll get him back as quickly as I can.”

The officers turned to Kurt. “What is your role in this situation?” Kellans asked.

“I found him in the dumpster behind my father’s shop.”

“And your father is?”

“Burt Hummel. Sam was in the dumpster behind Hummel Tires and Lube.”

“Why did you look in the dumpster?”

“I had gone home after I got off. Sam had been at the shop at 4:30 to pick me up. I told him that I needed to stay until 5:30. He decided to get some exercise and walk home.”

“Home? Meaning that you two live together.”

Carole spoke up. “They live with my husband Burt Hummel, myself, and my son Finn Hudson.”

“Fine. So, he left the shop a little after 4:30, but never made it home.”

“Right. I went home, showered, and made dinner, thinking that he must have decided to stop somewhere on the way home, but then when he wasn’t home by 6:30, I went out looking for him.”

“What is your relationship to Mr. Evans?”

Hiram asked, “Why is that relevant?”
The officer dropped it and moved on. “Does Mr. Evans have any known enemies?”

“A lot of people at school. McKinley. He was falsely outed as bisexual in our school newspaper earlier this spring. None of the jocks were pleased. The school implemented a new No Bullying policy this spring as well, so none of them were able to attack him on school property for fear of being expelled. If I had to guess, they were just biding their time until school ended and they managed to catch him by himself.”

“You said ‘falsely outed’ him. Does that mean that he is not bisexual?”

Hiram interrupted again, “What does that have to do with this investigation?”

“Motive. Mr. Hummel implied that these high school students attacked Mr. Evans based on information about his sexuality.”

“Why don’t you leave that until you can ask Sam if they gave him a reason? To pick them up for assault, you don’t need to know their motive.”

“Fine. So, you went back at your dad’s shop and you found Mr. Evans in the dumpster.”

“Yes. And I called 911 immediately and he was transported here by ambulance. He was unconscious when I found him.”

The officers stepped outside the room and waited until Sam was brought back from radiology. Once he was back, they began grilling him on every detail that he could remember. Hiram took notes and pulled out a mini tape recorder to record the entire interview. When the officers were done questioning Sam, they left.

Sam quietly asked, “How did you know where to look for me?”

“I got an anonymous text about 7:00 telling me where to find you.”

“I’m 99% sure who called you. He may be willing to testify against them, but there would have to be something in it for him.”

“We can talk about that later,” Hiram said. “For now, we need to wait to hear what the doctor says so that the police can finish their report.”

“I don’t want the text mentioned to the police,” Kurt said adamantly.

Hiram nodded in understanding.

After what seemed like an extraordinarily long wait, the doctor finally came back. He examined Sam’s left foot again and his right hand. “Well, you have two broken toes and a fracture in the fourth metatarsal bone in your foot. Your ankle is sprained. Your right hand looks pretty bad, but none of the bones are broken. I’m going to have it splinted. You have a mild concussion and obviously a lot of bruises. I’m going to put you in a removable walking cast, but you can’t bear any weight on your foot with the cast off, so you’ll need some kind of shower chair.”

“We can do that,” Carole said.

“Good. I’m going to have the orderly take you to shower before we wrap up any of your injuries. You are covered in far too much gunk right now.”

An orderly came in with a wheel chair and helped get Sam in it. He pushed him out of the room. The
police took a copy of the injury report with them and left.

By the time they got home, it was nearly 11:00. Kurt pulled into the garage. He helped Sam out of the Navigator. Kurt shut Sam’s door, and then gently wrapped his arms around Sam and kissed him. He had tears flowing down his cheeks. “I’m so sorry.”

“Kurt, look at me.”

Kurt took a step back and looked at Sam.

“You didn’t do anything wrong. Let’s get inside.” Sam reached out with his left hand and took Kurt’s hand and went inside.

“Do you want to eat?”

“I do actually. I’m really hungry.”

They slowly made their way to the dining room. Carole was already in the kitchen warming the casserole back up. She pulled the toppings out of the fridge. A few minutes later, all four of them were sitting at the table eating. Burt refrained from asking any questions, knowing that Sam wouldn’t want to answer them all again.

“You can sleep in the living room tonight if you want to, so you don’t have to climb the stairs,” Carole offered.

“Thanks, but I’d rather sleep in our bed.”

She nodded.

Kurt tried to help Sam with his dinner.

“How about you just get a bowl and get me a tablespoon? That way I can eat it more easily?”

“Sure.” Kurt took Sam’s plate into the kitchen, slid the contents onto a cutting board, chopped the taco casserole up, put it in a salad bowl, stirred it together, grabbed a spoon, and took it back and put it in front of Sam.

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.”

Sam grabbed the spoon and had more success than he had been having with the fork. “It’s partially my own fault.”

“No, it’s not,” Kurt insisted.

“I was told repeatedly to leave town. I didn’t. I shouldn’t have been stupid enough to walk three miles back to the house or however far it is. I just set myself up for being grabbed.”

“We shouldn’t have to live in fear of walking through town.”

“I know, but I should have listened when I was warned.”

“Then I should have killed myself years ago. I didn’t listen to their warnings. I’ve been harassed for
years.”

“At the hospital, you said you knew who alerted Kurt.”

“Yeah. I’m pretty sure it was Karofsky. He wasn’t with them, but I figured they called him to brag about it, and then he texted Kurt.”

“If they figure that out, he’ll be on their list too probably. We need to keep him out of it. He let me know where Sam was. Let’s just leave him with his one good deed and never mention it. So, no one talks about the text I got, period. Okay?”

“Sure, kiddo. I don’t know why you try to protect people who have hurt you, but sure.”

“Because it’s June. He’s 17. His mom still has time to send him to conversion camp for the summer. Nothing he’s done is worth enduring that. When he turns 18, she can’t make him go. And this time he did something good. It doesn’t outweigh all the other crap he did, but he could have done nothing with the information. We could still be out looking for Sam. But he’s safe and he’s okay. That’s what matters to me.”

“I get it,” Burt said. “A detective was here while you were still at the hospital. He asked me questions about the shop. He’s getting the security camera footage. We’ll know tomorrow whether or not they can see the guys who did this clear enough on the video.”

“I hope they can. That would make it easy to convict them.”

“I hope so too.” Carole added, “I’m sure you just want to go up and go to sleep for now.”

“Just don’t say anything about the text to anyone. I’d really prefer that no one ever find out that I was tipped off to his location. Everyone can just chalk it up to the fact that I’ve been dumpster tossed so many times that I just naturally looked in the dumpster.”

Everyone nodded.

When Sam and Kurt finished eating, Carole said, “Leave the dishes. I’ll get them. You two go ahead upstairs.”

“

“I took a shower when I got home earlier, so I’m just going to take a super fast one now. Maybe you can figure out which way you’ll be the most comfortable to sleep.” Kurt kissed him gently and left him sitting on the side of the bed while he showered quickly. When he came back out, he found Sam under the covers lying on his side facing the dresser. He turned some music on, turned most of the lights off. “I have some cream I can put on you to help the bruises heal faster, if you want me to put it on you.”

“Sure.”

After he finished, Kurt put the cream back in the bathroom, washed his hands, turned all of the lights off, and got in bed. “Do you want me to scoot up behind you or give you space?”

“I need you to touch me. Snuggle up, please?”

“Sure. Just let me know if anything I do hurts you.” He slipped his arm under Sam’s pillow and scooted up behind him. He put his hand on Sam’s waist, keeping the weight of his arm off of Sam. Once he was snuggled up, he asked, “Do you want to go to Kentucky tomorrow?”
“What?”

“I figured you might want to go live with your parents.”

“No. I’m not leaving. You don’t want me to leave do you?”

“Not at all and yes.”

“Explain.”

“I want to be with you, but I want you to be safe. You’re obviously not safe here. I’ll visit you. Maybe I could spend the weekends there with you.”

“I’m not leaving. I’m where I want to be. We have everything planned for the fall. We’re going to OSU Lima and McKinley part time. They’re going to end up in jail. The other jocks will knock it off when they realize that there are no more free passes for assaulting people. They were warned at that assembly. They were warned that if they behaved in public the way they did at school that they would end up in jail. Now, the rest of them will see that it’s true.”

“If you change your mind, I’ll understand.” He kissed Sam’s shoulder and up his neck. “I know you don’t want me to apologize, but I wish this hadn’t happened to you.”

“I know. I wish it hadn’t happened either. But it did and I’ll live. I’ll just be sore for a while. I’m not sure how I can go to the art camp anymore though or work at the shop for a while.”

“We’ll just have to see how much your hand bothers you in a couple of days. Maybe once the swelling goes down, it won’t be so bad.”

“Maybe. But I want you to know that I don’t blame you for this at all.”

“Ohkay. Let’s try to sleep. I love you. I’m so glad you’re going to be okay and that you’re here with me. I was really afraid when I found you.”

“I’m sure it was really scary. I don’t even want imagine finding you the way you found me.” He took Kurt’s hand from his waist and pulled it over onto his chest and held it there against his heart. “I love you too.”

Sunday morning, Kurt made breakfast and took it upstairs. When they finished, he took their laundry and the tray back down. While the laundry was in the washer, Kurt read through the card game rules again in bed and Sam was just lying next to him with his head in Kurt’s lap. Kurt ran his fingers through Sam’s hair.

“If you want to go to Kentucky just to visit we can. I’ll drive.”

“How about next weekend? We’re going to PRIDE in Columbus on Saturday, we could go to my parents’ place Saturday night and spend the night and stay until dinner on Sunday.”

“You still want to go to PRIDE? With your foot in the walking cast?”

“Yeah. It’s not a big deal. It’s not a lot taller than the combat boots and it’s not heavy or anything. I just need to find some shoes that are the same height as the walking boot so I can avoid throwing my back out from walking weird.”

“You can try the combat boot first. It’s probably got the highest heel.”
“When we get up, I will. Do you think you’re ready to try to play?”

“I think so. I’m sorry it’s taken me so long.”

“I’m not upset. You had a lot of lines to learn. Will you help me try out the combat boot and see about the height?”

“Of course.” He got up and grabbed a pair of socks out of the drawer. He stepped toward the bed and helped Sam sit up. Kurt took the walking cast off. He tried to put the sock on Sam, but he couldn’t get the elasticized top over his ankle. “I think I’m going to have to cut the ribbing off your sock to be able to get it on you. Or we can just leave you sockless on that foot for now and look for some more suitable socks.”

“Meh. These are pretty old. Just cut it to fit right. Once I don’t have to wear the cast anymore, I’ll buy some new socks.”

Kurt altered the sock so he could get it on, and then he put the walking cast boot back on. He went in the closet and grabbed the right combat boot and went back and sat on the bed and put it on Sam and tied it up for him.

Sam stood up and walked around the room. “They’re almost even. I bet if I got one of those gel heel pads or an insole liner for the boot, it would be just right. I can just loosen the laces on the boots and readjust them once we put an insole in.”

“We’ll get one later and you can try it and see. Come back over here and I’ll help you get some shorts on so you don’t have to take the walking boot and combat boot back off.”

After he was dressed, Sam grabbed his cards and Kurt’s off the shelf and sat down at the table. He moved one of the chairs around to left end of the table and sat down. “Let’s play.”

Kurt sat down at the table. They started their first Magic game. They had been playing for a while when there was a knock on the door.

Kurt said, “Come in.”

Carole opened the door and came in. “Morning, boys. Can the two of you come down please?”

“Sure.”

They walked into the living room to find Hiram waiting to talk to them. Kurt and Sam sat down on the couch. Carole sat in the empty chair.

“I need to know how you want to proceed, Sam.”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you want to have them tried as adults or do you want the juvenile court system involved?”

“I don’t really know what you mean still.”

“The four guys that jumped you are close enough to being 18 that we can ask for them to be tried as adults. They could get anywhere from 2-8 years in jail. If we let them be prosecuted as juveniles, they’ll most likely spend the next 6-8 months in juvie and then be released and their records will be sealed, meaning that no one will know that they assaulted you and they won’t have to list it on job
applications and other things.”

“That’s a really hard question to answer. In a perfect world, 6-8 months in juvie would get them to turn over a new leaf and not assault people. But I didn’t get that impression from Puck. He didn’t want to go back to juvie AT ALL. I got the feeling it was just a breeding ground for becoming an even worse person. And sending them to jail just prevents them from getting decent jobs later and making them angry unemployable people, which certainly won’t help them be less hostile.”

“What are the options for asking for some type of summer detention somewhere and then a year’s probation that states they’ll go straight to jail if they break the probation?” Kurt asked.

“Yeah, really all I want is for them to leave us alone and to pay all of the medical bills.”

“How about this option then? I will ask for them to cover the cost of the medical bills. I will ask for house arrest with electronic monitoring for two months. I will ask for mandatory counseling for anger issues during those two months, followed by 12 months probation. That will end their probation toward the end of next summer.”

“That’s good because then they can’t bother us during the summer next year since I don’t know where I’ll be going to college or when I’ll be leaving town. I’d rather them still be required to behave until we leave town.”

“What will the consequences be if they violate the terms?”

“Jail – two years? If the terms are violated, they will be picked up and remanded to the jail in Lima.”

“That will work. What do we need to do?”

“I’ll see what I can set up for today. If I can’t get anyone to meet today, I’ll do what I can to get it set for tomorrow morning. My guess is that their parents will work to make it happen today because they’re in the Lima lock up right now and it’s generally easier for adults to meet on a weekend.”

Kurt nodded.

Burt interrupted. “I think Sam needs to consider the fact that he can no longer work the job he has. Them paying the medical bills seems reasonable, but Sam uses the money from his job to pay for his insurance on his truck, gas, and his phone bill, plus any other personal expenses. The potential exists that he won’t be able to work for 6 weeks because of his foot, but we don’t even know the extent of the damage to his hand yet. He has to get in to see the orthopedist for that.”

Hiram agreed. “Burt’s right. Can you tally up what you will lose by not working for six weeks? We’ll put in an addendum that will cover longer if you aren’t released to go back then.”

Kurt got up and grabbed a piece of paper and wrote out the information about Sam’s lost wages for 6 weeks and handed it to Hiram.

“So, we’ll ask for $1200 in lost income, that can be amended if Sam can’t go back to work in 6 weeks. I’ll let you know when I can get a meeting set up.”

Sam said, “That’s fine. We can meet whenever.”

Hiram stood. “I’ll call whenever I know something.” Burt walked him out.
Kurt and Sam decided to go out shopping to get the shower stool and the insole for Sam’s boot and then to go out for lunch.

“How about we grab a pizza and go to the park?” Kurt asked. “Pizza is easy to eat one handed.”

“Sure. Let’s go to Goodwill too. I can walk fine now that I put that insole in. No lopsidedness at all. I want to get t-shirts or maybe a tank to paint for PRIDE.”

“That sounds fun. Do you have a design in mind?”

“I do. You’ll have to do both of ours because I obviously can’t paint right now.”

“Hopefully, the swelling will go down in a day or two.”

“I might get a couple of button up shirts if they have any I like. I don’t have many, so they’d be a good addition to my wardrobe.”

“Sounds like I’m rubbing off on you.”

“We’ll save that for a few days too.”

Kurt rolled his eyes and shook his head. Sam just laughed at him.

He’s adorable. Even after what they did to him, he’s still laughing. God, I love him so much. “I love you.” Kurt reached his right hand out over the console in the center.

“I love you too.” Sam took his hand and interlaced their fingers. “They’re not going to scare me away from you. Just so you know.”

Kurt pulled into the parking lot in front of Little Caesar’s and went in. A few minutes later, he was back with the pizza and put it in the back seat. He stopped at a gas station and got them drinks. He drove them to the park closest to the Goodwill.

They sat at a picnic table and ate the pizza. After they finished, Kurt tossed the box and went back to the picnic table. Sam was leaning against the edge. When Kurt got close enough, he reached out for Kurt’s hand and stood up. He twirled Kurt, who was careful not to bump into Sam’s foot. He pulled him flush to his chest and slow danced to the best of his ability and sang.

I just want to tell you how I’m feeling.

Gotta make you understand.

Never gonna give you up

Never gonna let you down

Never gonna run around and desert you

Never gonna make you cry

Never gonna say goodbye

Never gonna tell a lie and hurt you

He stopped after the chorus and kissed Kurt gently. It was just a quick kiss, but he kept hold of Kurt’s hand as they walked back to the SUV.
I am the luckiest guy in the whole world. Kurt had a huge smile on his face. “You’re a sweetheart. Crazy, but adorable.”

They both got in and Kurt pulled out to go shopping.

“Why am I crazy?”

“You just got the crap kicked out of you and you’re dancing with me, kissing me, and holding my hand in public.”

“And I’ll keep doing those things. It’s not like we were having sex in public. We’re not being obscene or breaking any laws. I love you and I’m not going to pretend like we just friends, unless you want me to. I will keep my hands to myself if it bothers you.”

“It doesn’t bother me. I just don’t want you to think that you have to prove anything to me. I know you love me.”

“I’m not doing it to prove something to you. I’m doing it because I want to.”

“Okay.”

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“So, tank or t-shirt?”

“I want to see if I can find a rainbow tie dye shirt first,” Sam answered.

They looked through the t-shirts and found three to consider. He explained his idea to Kurt, who started searching for a nice solid colored t-shirt and eventually found a nice emerald green one.

“Okay. So, button ups,” Kurt said.

They started looking through the racks. Kurt pulled out a few that he thought might fit Sam. When they were done, they went in the handicapped dressing room and Kurt helped Sam try all of the shirts on.

“I’m not sure that shirt shopping was a great idea for today,” Kurt said. “You’re not really in any shape to be doing this.”

“I’ll live. I took one of those pain pills this morning. I really want to make the shirts like we had planned to. I don’t want them keeping me from doing what I want.”

“Alright.”

“I like this one.” He chose a dip dye t-shirt that went from red at the top to purple at the bottom.

Kurt helped him get it off and put it on the bench. He helped him with the button ups and Sam picked three. Kurt got the shirt that Sam had been wearing back on him and they headed to the register to pay.

On their way back home, Sam’s phone rang.

“Sam, this is Hiram. Can the two of you please head down to the police station?”

“Sure. We’ll head there now.” Sam ended the call. “Hiram wants us to go to the police station.”
“Okay.” Kurt changed their course.

They were shown into a large conference room. The four jocks that attacked Sam were seated on one side of a conference table along with their parents. A man with a stack of papers in front of him sat in the middle.

On the other side of the table, sat Coach Beiste, Carole, Burt, and Hiram across from the other attorney. Sam sat next to Hiram and Kurt sat next to Sam.

“We’re here to discuss a plea deal for the four assailants in this case.”

“Alleged assailants,” a man, who Kurt assumed was Mr. Strando, said.

“Well, now that everyone is here, we are going to share the evidence that we have.” Hiram pulled up the video footage from the security cameras at the shop.

“I don’t want to be present for this. I lived through it once. I have no interest in watching the evidence.” Sam stood and took Kurt’s hand and led him out of the room and closed the door behind them. Sam pulled Kurt to his chest and wrapped his arms around him. “I don’t want you to see that.”

“I don’t want to see it.” Kurt wrapped his arms around Sam and just stood there until Carole came out to get them, which took a lot longer than Kurt had anticipated.

“It’s over. It turns out that the detective also got video evidence from a resident who called 911.”

They all went back in and sat down.

Coach Beiste was the first to speak. “The four of you are hereby expelled from William McKinley High School for violating the terms of the No Bullying agreement that the four of you signed. You are also banned from the school property. So, if you enroll in a school that competes against McKinley, you will not be allowed on school grounds for that game.”

Hiram spoke next. “We have definitive proof of the crimes you four committed and we are fully willing to proceed and move to prosecute all four of you as adults. The jail time for these offenses would range from 2-20 years and you will leave jail with a felony record.”

Mr. Strando spoke. “You’re going to threaten to put my kid in jail for 2-20 years for beating up a fag?”

“Your son will be tried in front of a jury and prosecuted for kidnapping, aggravated assault, and a list of other lesser crimes. With video footage proving that your son did these things, there is zero chance he will walk free. Aggravated assault alone is a felony. There is no distinction in the punishment for why someone assaulted someone else. But the kidnapping charge can result in 20 years in prison. Your son committed more than one felony offense.”

“This is insane,” he said.

“Shut up, Dad. You’re just making this worse,” Strando said.

Mrs. Adams spoke next. “You seem to be willing to offer something else. I’d like to hear it.”

Hiram spoke again. “My client would like to give your sons the opportunity to learn to control their anger and to learn from their many mistakes and wrong choices. He suggested a plea deal. Your sons
will attend counseling twice a week for their anger issues. They will be under house arrest with electronic surveillance for the next two months. They will be on probation for 12 months after their house arrest ends. They will not interact with my client or Kurt in any way. Obviously, the four of them will have to seek out a new way to finish high school since they will not be allowed to return to McKinley. The terms of their probation are spelled out in the document I will give you momentarily. If they break their terms of the probation, they will automatically be placed in the adult lock up in Lima until June of 2013, after which they will be placed on a two-year probation. The other part of the agreement is that the four families will divide the cost of Mr. Evans’ medical care – the emergency room, the x-rays, the cast, any physical therapy or surgery that he may need. Obviously, we cannot determine the full cost until after his injuries have completely healed. Additionally, the four of you will pay restitution for his missed hours at his job.”

“Chris has already been approached for a football scholarship,” Mr. Strando said.

“Then I suggest he keep himself out of trouble for the next year so that he can attend college,” Sam said.

“But if he can’t go back to McKinley, he can’t play with his team.”

Sam smarted back, “Then he should have thought of his future before he beat the crap out of me when I was just walking down the street minding my own business. What if I had planned on trying to get a football scholarship? My freaking foot is broken. It might never heal to where I can play again. But you know what? Right now my main concern is my hand. I’m an artist. I actually had a decent chance of going to college to study that. What if I never regain the full use of my hand? These four could have just ruined my future career opportunities. Actions have consequences. I’m giving them a chance to have a future that doesn’t include a felony conviction on their records.”

Mrs. Adams spoke, “Honey, you are being more than generous. Whatever these other three decide, Azimio and his father and I will sign the plea deal. And I know it means nothing, but I am sorry he did this to you. I have no idea what he was thinking. I didn’t raise him this way.”

Sam just nodded.

Kurt spoke, “Sam’s being nicer than he should be. You may say that you didn’t raise him that way, but you KNEW. I know you had to have spoken to Miss Pillsbury after the assembly that day. I know she would have told you the truth that Azimio is a constant, daily tormenter at the school. He has bullied people for the five years that I’ve known him. You may not have found out until recently, but what did you do about it? Did you get him help for his anger problems or did you just take his electronics away and ground him?”

Hiram spoke quietly, but firmly, cutting Kurt off, “Here are the agreements. Please look them over and make your decisions.” He stood and handed the public defender the paperwork. He distributed four copies to the four families to read while he looked through his own copy. The room was silent for nearly 20 minutes.

The three members of the Adams family signed the forms quickly. The other three families signed as well.

“Tomorrow morning, all of the signed pleas will be presented to the judge. As long as he signs them, the four of you will be fitted with electronic anklets and you’ll be released to your parents at some point tomorrow. If the judge believes that the sentence is too lenient, he may make additions. You’ll be given copies of the final agreement at sentencing and you’ll sign those before the four of them will be released.”
Sam spoke again, “This was a one-time deal. If anyone else attacks me or Kurt, we’ll ask for the maximum penalty and ask to have whoever it is tried as an adult. So, don’t get any ideas to get some of your buddies to rough us up while you’re on house arrest or probation. I want the four of you to get some help. I’m giving you a chance to become decent human beings. Don’t screw that up. If you violate your probation, you’ll end up in jail.”

“That’s all for today,” Hiram said. “You’ll be notified in the morning when to be here for the sentencing.”

The guards moved to take the four teens back to their cells. Once they had been removed from the room, their families and the public defender stood to leave. Mrs. Adams stayed behind and kept Kurt back to talk to him.

“I don’t appreciate you sassing me, young man, but I honestly don’t know where I went wrong. I did do my best with him. His brothers are not like this at all.”

“Maybe he needs to see a psychiatrist. Maybe he needs professional help,” Kurt said. “Obviously, grounding him or whatever you tried didn’t work. He’s been nothing but awful to me and quite a few other people for the five years I’ve known him. It’s not just because Sam and I are gay. He’s bullied Artie, if you remember him being mentioned – the one in the wheelchair. He’s bullied Rachel. There’s an entire group of students who turn and try to walk another direction when we see him in the hall. We plan our movements from classroom to classroom around where he is at that time. He’s cost us a lot of money in ruined clothes and other things over the years. He’s a menace. Seriously. Get him some help. He had never attacked Sam until he was outed by that gossip rag posing as a school newspaper. After that, the taunts began. Azimio started the locker shoves. He quit the physical things and resorted to just words after the No Bullying policy started, but I’m guessing that none of them actually read that they were agreeing to not bully people off of school grounds as well. They all need help.”

“I will do my best. I’m going to talk to his brothers and his father. Maybe we need to get him away from here. I don’t know. We moved here before we had kids to get away from the inner city in Chicago. I’ve watched some of my own family get killed in gang violence. Watching those videos of my son caused me to flash back. Honestly, I just wish someone had told me years ago. Maybe things would be different.”

“I can understand you feeling that way, but I hope you can understand that those of us who fear him were too afraid to rat him out to you or your husband. We don’t know the two of you, and from our perspective, the two of you could have been encouraging him to behave the way he did. Think about how Mr. Strando just reacted. Clearly he feels that his son’s actions are fine – that beating up fags is fine. We had no idea that Azimio was the only one in his family to act this way. We don’t know his brothers. We were much too afraid. Don’t forget I just spent most of the school year at a boarding school because my life was threatened. The bullying wasn’t a joke to us. Five broken bones for me and now three for Sam, plus whatever damage has been done to his hand. Hopefully, nothing permanent. But he is in a summer art camp that he paid for himself out of his own money from the job he works. It was supposed to be a boost to his CV to get into college into an art program. He may not even be able to participate with his injured hand. What your son and those other three did could have a lifelong impact on what Sam can do. It’s just wrong. He was kind and lenient. This is the first time they’ve attacked him. I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve been injured at their hands. But since none of my attacks were caught on video, no one did anything to the people who attacked me. The four of them deserve the felony records and the years in jail for what they’ve put me through.”

“I get that. And I can’t undo what they’ve done. You tell me what Azimio owes you for the damages
he caused and I’ll see to it that you’re reimbursed. It may take a while because he can’t get a job this summer while under house arrest, but I’ll see to it that you get reimbursed somehow. Take down my address.” She gave it to him.

Sam came back into the room looking for him. He walked up beside Kurt and took Kurt’s hand.

“Thank you for giving Azimio a chance to change. From everything I’ve heard, he doesn’t deserve it. And what I saw on the video makes me sick.” She shook her head. “I just don’t know what to think. I’m sorry.” She wiped tears from her eyes and walked toward the door.

Kurt turned and followed her out, still holding Sam’s hand.

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When they got back home, they went back upstairs and sat back down to play the game they had been playing when Hiram had come that morning.

While they were re-examining their cards and the stacks and trying to remember what they had been planning when they were interrupted, Sam asked, “You’re not angry with me, are you?”

Kurt looked up at him. “No. What would I be angry at you for?”

“For letting the four of them off easy. They’ve hurt you for years and I had the chance to put them all in jail and I didn’t do it.”

“Oh. You know that I’m not a violent person and I would rather see people learn to be decent human beings than to go to jail and come out worse. I’m not angry with you. All of I’ve ever really wanted was for them to leave me alone. Like I said before, I don’t need everyone to like me. I would be glad to accept mutual ignoring. Non-interactive co-existence works for me. And with the stipulations to the plea deal, if they end up in jail, it will be their own doing – basically choosing to go to jail.”

They both let the topic drop and returned to their game. Kurt left a few times working on their laundry.

When they finished, Sam put their deck boxes back on the shelf. “I’m ready to shower if you’re ready to help me. We didn’t get our Sunday snuggles.”

“Okay.” Kurt pulled his phone out to look at the timer he had set. “But the laundry will be done in five minutes. I’m going to head down there and grab the last load and bring it up. I’ll be right back. Maybe you can set everything up while I’m gone.” He kissed him again when he walked past.

Sam got up and turned some music on and most of the lights off while Kurt was gone. When Kurt brought the laundry back up, Sam sat on the bed and folded while Kurt hung things up and put them in the closet.

“How about this one tomorrow?” Kurt asked about the last shirt he was going to hang up.

“Sure. Just grab a pair of jeans. Wearing the combat boots with shorts looks pretty weird.”

“Not if you wore my black bondage shorts.”

“I’m pretty sure you don’t want me to wear those to art camp. Plus, I don’t think they go with that shirt you just laid out for me to wear.”

“Two very valid points,” Kurt said as he grabbed a pair of jeans and put them on the dresser. Kurt
stepped closer to Sam and started to unbutton his shirt and took it off. “I think it will be easier to take your jeans off in the bathroom.” He grabbed some boxer briefs and a pair of socks out of the dresser. He put one sock on top of Sam’s jeans and took the other sock, chopped the cuff off, and headed into the bathroom.

Sam followed him and sat down on the stool slipping his underwear and jeans down before sitting down. Kurt removed the walking cast and his clothes. Sam handed Kurt the wrist/hand brace. Kurt undressed and got in the shower with him. He washed Sam’s hair and then let Sam wash himself while Kurt showered. Kurt made sure that Sam didn’t have any soap left on him and turned the water off and got their towels. Once the arm brace was back on, Kurt helped Sam into the underwear and got the walking cast back on him.

“This is going to put a serious damper on how much fun showering with you normally is,” Sam said.

Kurt turned and kissed him. “It’s not so bad. I still have you. We’re still together. You could still be lying in a hospital bed. There will be no complaints from me about helping you.” He carefully pressed Sam to the bathroom wall and started kissing him. He ran his hand down Sam’s arms.

Sam wrapped his arm around Kurt’s waist. “You’re right. Slow or not, I’m still here with you. Let’s move this to the bed.”

“I have to brush my teeth and put my moisturizer on.”

“Of course. Brush your teeth and then I’ll brush mine.”

Sam turned off the rest of the lights and then got in bed while Kurt finished up. Kurt got in bed just a couple of minutes later. They both lay flat on their backs for a few minutes.

Kurt slid his hand over and took Sam’s hand and interlaced their fingers. “I didn’t want this to be your life too. This is why I tried to break it off with you in the visitor’s lounge not long after we started dating. It’s why I didn’t want you to come out, even after you didn’t want to break up with me.”

“I know. And I admit that I was a little cocky about it. I was naïve and thought that I’d be less of a target than you were because they knew I would fight back. I just never really considered that four of them would come after me off school grounds. I just never even considered that I would be in danger walking home from the shop. I’m not saying that I would have made a different decision in the visitor’s room that night. I wouldn’t have let you break it off with me unless it was because you didn’t want to be with me, just like I said that night. But I would have listened to you about how awful the guys would be. Saturday, I would have either stayed at the shop and waited with you or I would have driven home and come back for you whenever you were done. When you stay after closing on Saturdays, I don’t want you to go out into that parking lot alone.”

“I don’t usually stay at the shop by myself. Yesterday was unusual. You were coming back. So, when the other guys left, I was locked in the building. And with no cars in the lot, anyone who drove by wouldn’t have thought anybody was there. But I won’t stay alone past closing anymore, if that’s what you want.”

“I don’t want you in the parking lot alone.”

“Okay. I want to plan our camping trip tomorrow, unless you don’t want to go anymore.”

“I do want to go. We need to retreat the tent. Maybe we can do that next weekend.”

“Sounds like a good plan. We’ll need to rethink our theme park plan and move it until after you can
quit wearing the walking cast and wrist/hand splint.”

“I think a planning session with our calendar is in order for tomorrow evening. Maybe you can find out the performance dates and times tomorrow at camp.”

“I’ll try. How do you want to sleep tonight?”

“Sleeping on my right side last night wasn’t that comfortable. Maybe we can switch sides and I can be the little spoon and sleep on my left side to see if that’s more comfortable.”

Kurt propped up on his elbow a bit and kissed Sam. “I forgot to put the bruise cream on. I’m going to grab it.” He brought it back and applied it to the worst of Sam’s bruises and put the tube back in the bathroom. Sam moved to the other side of the bed while Kurt was gone and he lay down on his left side. “Can you grab one of the throw pillows? I’m going to try putting it next to me to prop my hand on.”

“Sure.” Kurt grabbed a pillow. Kurt gently moved Sam’s hand towards his mouth and placed gentle kisses on his thumb and each finger. “Maybe kisses have healing powers. It’s worth a try. I want you to be able to draw and paint again.” He put Sam’s hand back down gently, letting Sam reposition it. He walked around the bed and scooted up behind him. “I love you so much.” Kurt kissed him on the back of the neck.

“I’m all for being kissed anywhere you want to kiss me. I love you too.”
Chapter 17

Kurt finished tracing the LOVE stencil on Sam’s shirt and moved on to tracing it on his own shirt and then painted the letters on his shirt white as the base coat. The block letters were about 10cm high and spanned about three quarters of the shirt right across the heart. Sam worked on mixing some paint to get it as close to the green color of Kurt’s shirt as possible. Kurt finished with the white before Sam had gotten the mixing done. He got up and cleaned the paintbrush he had been using.

“I think I’ve finally got it. You need to go ahead and use it before it dries up.”

Kurt traded places with Sam and began to carefully fill in the letters on Sam’s shirt using the precisely mixed paint. He went as quickly as he could while being as neat as possible. About 30 minutes later, he had finished. “What do you think? Is it what you were going for?”

“It’s perfect. I’m almost done mixing the orangish yellow and reddish orange for your shirt.”

Kurt checked on his own shirt. “It’s dry enough to start the dip dye effect. I hope I can pull it off.”

“I think you’ll be fine. I took a picture of the stenciled area of my shirt before you painted over it. You can look at the picture and copy it. You can do it. And if it’s not perfect, it doesn’t matter. People will get the idea. I’ve got the reddish orange and orangish yellow ready for you to use and I’ll work on mixing some that’s the blended color next.”

Kurt looked at the photo of the letters and painted the top half of the letters the reddish orange color and the bottom third orangish yellow. By the time he was done, Sam had the last color ready. Kurt used it to paint the space between the two colors and then consulted the photo numerous time to mimic the dip dye effect using all three colors.

“Perfect. It looks great.”

Sam moved his shirt so that it was closer to Kurt’s on the table. When lying side by side, the shirts looked like the letters had been cut out and swapped on the shirts.

“I like them. It’s a cool idea. I’ve never seen anything like it, so I think we’ll be unique. And we’ll definitely look like we’re together.” He turned to kiss Sam. He got up and took all of the paintbrushes into the bathroom to clean them before the paint dried on them.

“Let’s leave them there to dry for now. Let’s go down and watch the movie.”

Kurt was struggling to walk up the stairs nearly as much as Sam was. When they got into their bedroom, Kurt locked the door immediately.

“Well, that was the most interesting movie viewing experience I’ve ever had,” Kurt said pressing Sam to the door while removing his shirt and kissing him. “I’m not sure how much of the plot I can explain to anyone without saying something about where your hand was during the scene.”

Sam stuck his hand back into Kurt’s pants.

“Uh huh. Like that. We’re going to have to watch it a second time for me to know what actually
happened.” He pressed in to kiss Sam passionately. “Please?”

“Of course. I would never start something I didn’t intend to finish,” Sam managed to get out as Kurt kissed down his neck. “Do you want me to do it right here? Or do you want to get in the shower?”

Kurt started stripping Sam the rest of the way and quickly removed all of his clothes as well, which didn’t take long since they were both barefoot and wearing shorts.

“Got it.”

After their enjoyable shower, Kurt hooked his iPod to the stereo system and started a quiet jazzy playlist. He sat on the bed and put the bruise cream on Sam.

“They’re looking pretty good. How are you feeling?”

“Not bad. I’m pretty used to getting banged around in football. I think that cream really helps. They’re healing up better than I thought they would.”

“Your cheek is still a little green. But it’s getting better. I didn’t tell you yet, but I already told Eric that I will be leaving at lunch on Monday. I know you were going to go alone to see the orthopedist, but I want to go with you.”

He put the cream back on his vanity, turned the lights off, and got in bed with Sam, who quickly rolled toward him and rearranged him to make room for Sam to lay his head on Kurt’s chest.

“Won’t you miss out on rehearsal?”

“No. We rehearse in the mornings before lunch. In the afternoons, we do other stuff – improv, sight singing, cold reading practice for auditions, and stuff like that. But if I leave at 11:30, I can pick you up in time for your appointment. I already told Nick and Jeff that they’d need to drive separately on Monday since I didn’t know how long we might end up at the doctor’s office. He could want to do more x-rays or anything. I didn’t want the two of them to potentially end up stranded.”

“Alright. It’s been a crazy week. I hope whoever those four have to see for counseling is good.”

“Me too. I’m just glad they will be leaving us alone. With them off the team, will you reconsider playing football?”

“I don’t know. I hadn’t really thought about it. Now that I’ve been thinking about pursuing an art degree of some sort, I’m not sure that playing a sport that endangers my hands is a good idea. A week with my hand messed up like this has shown me how much I actually sketch. I never thought about it, but when my guitar was hocked and we had sold off all that other stuff, I spent a lot of my bits and pieces of free time sketching. I’ve been playing my guitar again since I’ve had it back, but I still sketch a lot. I’ve missed it this week.”

Kurt changed the topic to something more cheerful. “I’m looking forward to going to PRIDE. One more week. I think our shirts are great.”

“You did a good job on them. I know we were going to start on our Comic Con outfits tomorrow, but that will have to wait. Hopefully in a week or two I’ll have this splint off and we can start working on them.”

“We still have plenty of time. It’s supposed to be really nice tomorrow, which will work out well for
retreating the tent.”

“I was supposed to do that with you.”

“It’s okay. Carole’s off and she said she’d help me set it up after breakfast tomorrow.” Kurt ran his hand along Sam’s arm. “It’s okay.” Kurt kissed Sam on the forehead. “I mean it. I’m upset that you’re hurt, but that’s it. Let’s get some sleep. Do you want to stay like this?”

“I don’t think I can actually sleep this way, but I’d like you to hold me.”

“Alright then, trade me sides.” Kurt got up. He grabbed a throw pillow and put it next to Sam to prop his hand on. He walked around the bed and lay down on the side near the dresser where Sam usually slept. He let Sam get the pillow positioned, and then he scooted up behind him and got comfortable. “Are we good?”

“I think so.”

Kurt kissed Sam on the shoulder. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Sam was having a fantastic dream, which he slowly realized was not a dream at all when he opened his eyes and saw Kurt looking up at him while kissing down his chest, and then go right back to what he had been doing. He nodded and Kurt continued on his quest.

Kurt slid up in the bed afterwards and kissed up Sam’s neck until he reached his ear. “Good morning, sweetie.”

“That is the best way to wake up, ever.” He hadn’t quite gotten his breath back yet. “That was amazing.”

“Are you ready to go to Columbus?”

“Only after I get to do the same thing to you somehow. I’m fed up with not getting to do what I want to because of this dumb cast and splint.”

“I’m sure we can come up with a way.” He kissed back down Sam’s neck and down his chest.

“We need to get moving. We spent a lot more time in bed after the alarm went off than I had planned for, but it was absolutely worth it.” Kurt kissed Sam chastely.

“We can eat while we’re in the Navigator to make up for lost time.” Sam moved to pin Kurt against the closet door that he had just closed and pressed another kiss to Kurt’s lips, but not another gentle kiss. He pressed in and kissed Kurt with all the passion he felt for him.

After a couple of minutes, Kurt pulled back and gave Sam a couple of chaste kisses, struggling to keep his focus. “Come on Mister Kisser. Let’s go make ourselves a cold sandwich and get out of here before we end up making Nick and Jeff stand around and wait on us.”

Jeff came running up to them and practically tackled Kurt. “I LOVE your shirts!”
“Thank you,” Kurt said. “They were Sam’s idea.”

“But Kurt actually painted them,” Sam added.

Nick said, “We’re hoping to find a couple of shirts we like here today somewhere.”

“Happy Birthday!”

“Thanks. This is definitely a cool thing to do on my birthday.”

“It’s already amazing and we’ve only just gotten here,” Kurt said. “Just seeing so many couples made it worth the drive. I could just sit around and people watch and go home happy.”

“Let’s get moving to find a place to watch the parade from, okay?” Jeff asked.

Later that afternoon, the four of them sat at a booth in a local restaurant waiting for their food to arrive.

“So, now that we can hear ourselves think again, what was your favorite part?” Nick asked.

Kurt was the first to answer. “I can’t say that it was my favorite, but it’s what sticks out in my mind the most.”

“What?” Nick prompted.

“All of the churches that had people walking in the parade. I’ve heard stories of supposedly gay-friendly churches, but they always struck me as the type of things that went along with stories about unicorns and the tooth fairy. It just surprised me. In Lima, there are no such churches. I’m not saying that I’ve changed my mind and that I believe there is a God, but it’s nice to know that not EVERYONE who believes in God hates people who aren’t straight.”

“I was surprised by the hockey team,” Sam said. “From our experience, accepting jocks live in Kurt’s fantasy land of unicorns as well.”

Jeff said, “What surprised me the most were the women walking around without their shirts on. Not that it does anything for me, but I was surprised that they weren’t arrested or told to put shirts on. I thought it would violate some type of public indecency law.”

“That was surprising,” Nick agreed. “And it kind of goes along with mine. There were more kids than I expected. I thought a couple of the floats were a bit much, and not really appropriate for a family event, like the women walking around shirtless. I wouldn’t be comfortable bringing any kids or maybe even some of my family because I think they’d get the wrong idea.”

Sam said, “Same for me. I don’t even know what some of that stuff was about and I don’t think I want to know. But I will say that it made me uncomfortable to see people on their hands and knees wearing dog collars and leashes with whatever that was on their heads. I’m not saying they shouldn’t be free to do or wear whatever they want to, but I’m not sure that doing it in public around kids is a good idea. I wouldn’t want to be the one trying to explain it to my little brother and sister.”

Kurt said, “There are consent laws for a reason, and I guess to me if someone isn’t old enough to consent to do whatever is being portrayed, it shouldn’t be done in the presence of those not old enough to consent.”
Their food came and they all stopped talking and started to eat. The parade was longer than they had anticipated and they were all starving. Once they had finished eating, they discussed what else they wanted to do.

“So, to the informational area? I’d like to see who all has booths,” Kurt said.

Sam added, “We were also thinking of going to the OSU campus to look around. And to the bookstore to see if we can get good used copies of the books we need for the fall while they have a good selection.”

“That could be fun. We need to make some real campus visits soon. Maybe we can makes lists and compare them and visit any of the places that we have in common on our lists together this summer,” Nick said.

“That would be a lot of fun,” Jeff said. “And you two are old enough to rent hotel rooms if we want to stay overnight somewhere.”

“That’s true,” Kurt said. “I hadn’t really thought about it. I’ve only been 18 for a couple of weeks.”

“If we split the cost of a room, it shouldn’t be more than $30-40 each, even at a really nice place with a pool,” Jeff added.

“It’s a good idea and we all need to get started. I kept my stuff from the College and Career class at Dalton. I’ll loan it to the two of you to do on your own and then we can make lists and plans,” Kurt said.

The waitress finally came back with their bills. They paid, left a tip, and headed back out.

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Several hours later, Kurt and Sam were on their way to Kentucky. Sam hadn’t been to see his family since he had visited for his birthday the beginning of May. In the 11 weeks they had been in Kentucky, Sam had only seen them that once.

“It feels really weird to visit them when it seems like it should feel like home, but it doesn’t at all. So, if I seem like I’m acting strange, don’t take it personally, okay?”

“Okay. I have only a little experience with that type of thing when my dad and Carole bought the house we live in. I only came to visit on weekends and winter break. I think you actually have spent more nights there than I have or it’s pretty close. I guess when we were both there over spring break was when I started to feel more at home. But since you’ve never lived in your family’s new place, I can imagine how strange it is.”

“There’s no bedroom that’s mine. Not that there should be, but it’s just weird having to sleep in Stevie’s room. Oh. I hadn’t thought about it. They may not let us sleep together. I didn’t even think to ask. Your dad has been all cool about it, but my parents may not be willing to start a precedent they don’t want to have to continue with – letting a boyfriend or girlfriend sleep in the same bed. I guess we’ll find out when we get there. I’m so tired, I’m sure I’ll just crash no matter where they say I can sleep.”

“Do Stevie and Stacey know? I mean you dated Quinn and they knew about that.”

“I assume they do. I hadn’t really thought about it. I didn’t say anything specific when I was there. It was a crazy busy two days. We did a Mother’s Day thing a day early on Saturday. We drove to Tennessee early that morning and spent half the day with my grandma and the other half with my
granny. Sunday morning, we drove back and we made my mom lunch and then later that afternoon, we had a cake for me. Whenever I’m with them, everything is a lot more about Stevie and Stacey than it is about me. They see me as their own personal entertainer.”

“I know. It’s adorable. And you’re great with them.”

“I’ll ask privately when we get there about the sleeping arrangements.”

Kurt changed the subject. “We got a lot of comments on our shirts. We can wear them again next year. I think I’m going to collect the dog tags. I wonder if other PRIDE celebrations use them. It would be cool to make a shallow shadowbox displaying all of the dog tags.”

“It would. Are you ready for my awesome road trip sing-a-long CD?”

“That sounds interesting.”

Sam laughed. “It is.” He started it and “Islands in the Stream” started to play.

“You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“Nope. You’ve gotta sing.”

And we rely on each other uh huh...

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Sam took his mom aside while Kurt was talking to his dad and Stevie and Stacey.

“What’s wrong, honey?”

“Nothing. Kurt and I just need to know where we’re sleeping.”

“In Stevie’s room.”

“Together?”

“Yes. They think Kurt is your best friend. That’s it.”

“You mean you didn’t tell them that Kurt’s my boyfriend?”

“No, we didn’t.”

“Are you keeping it from them on purpose?”

“I’m sorry, honey. We are. We don’t like it here. That’s why we’re renting this house instead of buying one here. We don’t want to stay here. Your dad is still looking for positions other places. This is a very conservative place. We were concerned that Stevie would struggle even more to make friends if he made comments about his big brother’s boyfriend.”

“I will abide by your wishes for now, but I don’t like it. I love Kurt and it’s not right for me to have to go out there and tell him that we have to hide who we are in my family’s home. I’m not sure if you have some mistaken idea that my relationship with him is like when I dated Quinn, but it’s not. Dating Quinn was a mistake. Being with Kurt is nothing like being with Quinn. I love Kurt and I’m in love with Kurt and we’re both adults. It’s my intention to be with Kurt for as long as he’ll have me. Stevie and Stacey will have to know sooner or later and the longer you wait to tell them, the more they’re going to feel lied to.”
She nodded and sighed.

“He’s not with me because I’m the quarterback. He is amazing. He loves me too, you know. He loves me even though I’m a crazy sci fi geek who likes comic books and doing impressions. He laughs at my jokes. He learned to play Magic just so I’d have someone to play with again. We’re going to Comic Con in Columbus this fall. We’re going to make costumes and dress up. He tutored me for months and never once made me feel stupid.”

“Honey, calm down. Your dad and I are both really happy for you. We really are. And you know that we have nothing against Kurt. He’s really great.”

“But… I hear a ‘but’ coming.”

“But I’m not changing my mind. If we move someplace more open, we’ll reconsider.”

“After such an amazing day at the PRIDE festival, I can’t believe that I have to go out there and tell him that we can’t be a couple in my own family’s home.” Sam turned and walked out of the kitchen and back into the living room. He got Kurt’s attention and motioned for him to bring their overnight bag.

Kurt followed him to Stevie’s room. Sam shut the door behind them and leaned back against it. Kurt put the bag down on the end of the bed and turned back to face Sam. He took advantage of Sam being against the door already and put his hands on Sam’s biceps and pressed himself up against Sam. He kissed up his neck, down his jaw line, and then connected their lips. Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt and held him close.

Sam broke the kiss and spoke quietly. “I want you to know that I love you. You know that, right?”

Kurt nodded, but looked concerned.

Sam took a deep breath and let it out slowly. He ran his left hand along Kurt’s cheek. “You know that I’m not ashamed in any way about us being together, don’t you?”

“I know. What’s going on?”

“My parents. They don’t want Stevie and Stacey to know that we’re dating. They don’t want them to know that I’m gay. Or, I’m assuming, that you’re gay.”

“I thought they were okay with you being gay, with us being together. I wouldn’t have come otherwise. I would have just dropped you off to visit by yourself and I would have found a cheap motel for the night and picked you back up tomorrow afternoon. I won’t come between you and your family. I love you, but I won’t make you choose like that. You can just come see them without me from now on. You can just tell Stevie and Stacey that I’m not feeling well, which is true.” Kurt turned and picked the bag back up. “Can you please just show me where the bathroom is so that I can go ahead and shower?”

Sam nodded. He knew that once Kurt had put his walls back up that nothing he did or said at that point would make a difference. He opened the door and pointed across the hall. Kurt grabbed their bag, crossed the hall, and went inside.

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Sam went back out to the living room.

“Where’s Kurt?” Stacey asked.
“He’s not feeling great right now. He decided to go ahead and take a shower and lie down for a while.”

“Oh. I wanted him to fix my hair and play Barbies with me. I have them all set up in my room.”

“Well, maybe the shower will make him feel better.”

“Maybe. Maybe he just rode in the car too much. Sometimes that makes me feel kind of yucky too.”

“Maybe. Let’s go help Mom with dinner. You can set the table.”

“Okay.”

When Kurt didn’t come back after his shower, Sam just gave the same excuse to everyone else that he had given to Stacey. They sat down and ate dinner together. After everyone had eaten and everything was cleared away, Stevie got Trouble out and set it up. Stacey played on a team with Mary since only four people could play. They played a few other board games and then it was time for Stevie and Stacey to go to bed. Sam waited for them to shower and he put them in Stacey’s bed together.

Before he left the room, Stacey said, “Tell Kurt I hope he feels better tomorrow.”

“I will.” He turned off the light and shut the door.

Once everyone had gone to bed, Kurt grabbed their bag and took it to the bathroom. Sam followed him quietly. Sam started to undress and Kurt went to the kitchen to look for a pitcher of some sort. He was very quiet and took a plastic pitcher back to the bathroom with him. He used it to rinse Sam since they had no shower chair and the showerhead was the fixed in place type. It took quite a bit longer than normal, despite the fact that Kurt was being as efficient as possible. Once Sam was finally dry and dressed, he took their stuff back to Stevie’s room, while Kurt put the pitcher in the kitchen sink. After Kurt came back, Sam closed the door.

Sam spoke quieter than a whisper, “Pull the bed down so that it’s blocking the door from being opened. There’s no lock and I’m not making you sleep on the floor. This way we keep our privacy.”

Kurt pulled on the footboard where it attached to the bed frame and moved it down enough that it would keep the door from opening. He had already put the pillows on the opposite end of the bed trying to get it so that Sam would be comfortable. They both lay down and Kurt covered their legs with the sheet. The house had a large window A/C unit in the main room, but he knew with the door shut, it would get warm in the bedroom overnight.

“I’m sorry I sulked during dinner. I’ll have my ‘big boy’ pants on in the morning and it will be fine.”

“It won’t be fine. It isn’t fine. My mom wants us to go to church with them in the morning. I told her maybe.”

“You came to spend time with your family. I’m not angry with you, but I don’t want to go to church. I mean, if tonight had been different and she told you that they go to a church like one of those ones we saw earlier in the parade, I would have gone just to see what a non-homophobic church is like. I guess my ‘recovery’ will take place while you all are gone. I brought my script. I’ll just review my lines and maybe work on a song or two. I transferred the music from my practice CD to my phone the other day.”
“I didn’t expect this. I promise. I would have never brought you here if I had known they were going to act like this.”

“I believe you. I know you’re exhausted. Let’s just try to get some sleep.”

“Kiss me?”

“Of course.” Kurt moved so that he could kiss Sam, and then he lay back down and snuggled up behind him. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

The next morning, Kurt and Sam sat down to breakfast with the rest of Sam’s family.

“I’m glad you’re feeling better, Kurt,” Stacey said. “I was sad that you were sick last night. Maybe you should take some of that nasty pink stuff Mommy gives me when we have to go on long car rides so you don’t feel so sick afterwards.”

“That’s a good idea. Do you want me to fix your hair before you go to church?”

“Yes! Yes, please.”

“Go ahead,” Sam said. “I’ll clean up while you fix her hair.”

Kurt followed Stacey to her room and French braided her hair and put a ribbon at the bottom. “What do you think?” he asked as she looked in the mirror on her dresser.

“It’s perfect! Thank you.” She wrapped her arms around him. “Are you coming with us?”

“I’m going to rest a little more while you’re gone. That way, I’ll feel completely better by the time you get back.”

“Okay.”

Kurt went back into Stevie’s room. Stevie had gotten dressed while Kurt was doing Stacey’s hair. Kurt shut the door behind him and pulled the bed back down over the doorway. He walked over to help Sam button his shirt. He kept himself from running his hands all over Sam’s abs and focused on the task at hand. Sam frowned.

“Am I not doing it right?”

“Unfortunately, you are,” Sam said quietly. “Usually you’re a lot less helpful, at least for a few minutes.”

Kurt laughed and stepped closer once he finished. He helped Sam get his shirt tucked into his jeans. Once he fastened his pants and zipped them, he leaned into Sam’s ear. “I didn’t think it would be very nice to send you out to the car to go to church with a hard on and I don’t think you can be quiet enough for me to blow you before you go.”

“Well, that was completely unsuccessful.” He adjusted himself, and then kissed Kurt. “You’re just so incredibly sexy. You don’t have to do anything intentional. You’re just gorgeous.”

“SAM!” they heard Dwight yell from the front door.
“Gotta go.” Sam kissed him quickly.

Kurt pushed the bed forward again, allowing the door to open.

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When they came back from church, Kurt could sense the tension.

“Kurt!” Stacey ran and threw herself at him and hugged him.

“Stacey!” he said as he braced himself. “So, how about you and Stevie change your clothes and the two of you can help me make lunch?”

“Yay!”

“Sure,” Stevie said. “We’ll be right back.”

“Please tell me what you want us to make,” Kurt said to Mary.

She pulled out what she was going to prepare and sat it on the counter. It didn’t take long before Stevie and Stacey were back. Kurt turned his phone on, pressed an upbeat play list of jazz songs, and put it on top of the fridge to create a sound barrier. Kurt kept a running narrative about what he was doing and managed to keep both of them from leaving the room.

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Sam took his parents into their bedroom since it was the farthest from the kitchen.

“I can’t BELIEVE you’re taking them to a church like that. Not only won’t you let me tell them and let me be myself in my family’s home, you’re taking them to a church that has a display and a sign up sheet to protest the PRIDE celebration and parade in Cincinnati in a few weeks.”

“Honey, that’s where the kids they go to school with invited them to go to church. Stevie’s Boy Scout Troop meets there. They have a girls group like Girls Scouts that Stacey goes to. Their friends go to church there. The ladies that I work with go there.”

“I DON’T CARE!” Sam said very emphatically, while managing to keep his voice low. “I can’t believe you’re going to let my own brother and sister grow up having friends who hate me and the person I love without even knowing us. You can’t guarantee that you can find another good job or how long it will take. They’re young and impressionable. I thought you were going to teach them that love is love. And instead, their friends’ older siblings are signing up to protest people like me. I saw them with my own eyes.”

“Honey, we won’t let them do something like that.”

“It doesn’t matter though, does it? All of their Boy Scout leaders and Sunday School teachers and their friends parents will have already convinced them that being gay is a one way ticket straight to hell. I told Kurt that you WEREN’T like that. I told him that you would accept us. I feel like such a huge LIAR. I brought him here where I thought you would be as kind to him as his parents are to me. As soon as we eat and watch whatever movie it is that Stacey picked from the Red Box on the way here, Kurt and I are leaving. I can’t do this. I can’t believe this. I thought you loved me, all of me.” Sam wiped his eyes, opened the door and went directly into the bathroom. He got a washcloth wet with cold water and pressed it to his eyes. He calmed down and went to the kitchen.

“Sammy! I set the table and the food is done. “Come look. I helped make the macaroni and cheese.”
“It looks great, Stacey. Let’s eat and then watch the movie you picked. Are you going to tell me what it is yet?”

“Nope. You gotta wait.”

Everyone else came in and sat down to eat.

Sam knelt down and pulled Stacey into a hug. “I love you, Stacey.”

“I love you too, Sammy. Why are you crying?”

“Oh, just because I miss you when I don’t see you very often.”

“I miss you too, but Kurt’s mommy and daddy are nice to you, right? So, that’s good.”

“It is. They are very nice to me.” He kissed her on the cheek before he stood back up.

“I’m glad you came to see us, Son. Have a safe trip back.”

Mary hugged him gently. “Let me know what the doctor says tomorrow.”

“I will.”

Sam high-fived Stevie. “Keep up the good work on those drawings. You’re getting better and better.”

Stevie face lit up with the compliment from Sam. “I will.”

Sam walked out to the Navigator and waved before he got in.

They rode in silence for a while. Kurt reached out and offered his hand. Sam took it and interlaced their fingers. He closed his eyes and tipped his head back for a while. Kurt was focused on the road and didn’t realize that Sam was crying until he heard him snuffle. He let him be for a few minutes and found an exit where he could pull off the highway easily. He pulled into an Arby’s lot and parked.

“Hey, sweetie, what’s going on? Why did we leave early?”

Kurt opened the glove box and pulled out a travel pack of tissues and gave it to Sam.

“I won’t be going back. That was my last visit until my parents come to their senses.”

“What do you mean?”

Sam told him about the display in the church foyer and the teens signing up to go protest with their youth group, as well as the adults signing up to go with them. He told Kurt everything his parents had said.

“Oh, Sam. I’m so sorry.”

“You didn’t do anything.”

“You can go visit them without me. It’s not what I was expecting from how things have been up until now.”
“Me neither. When I was there for my birthday, what was it, 7 or 8 weeks ago? We didn’t go to church that morning because we had driven back from Tennessee and we got back about 11:00, or so. The church service had already started, so we just stayed home. I’m sorry I’m such a mess.” Sam took the tissues and used more to wipe his eyes and blow his nose.

“You’re fine. Being sad and crying just proves you’re human.”

“I’m not going back in the closet and I’m not going to be part of them allowing my brother and sister to be brainwashed. As soon as they’re teenagers, I’m going to talk to them about this stuff if my parents haven’t gotten their act together before then. I mean I understand wanting to be part of the community there, but when they say they don’t want to stay, why are they becoming so involved? I know there’s no answer to that question that will make me be okay with what they’re doing. All I can hope is that they move soon enough that Stevie hasn’t gotten old enough to be in the youth group yet. That’s probably like 6th or 7th grade. So, that’s not for another four years or so. But still he’ll hear stuff from the older siblings of his friends. It just makes me so angry. You can go back out on the highway so we can head home. I don’t want to just sit in this parking lot.”

“Okay.” Kurt restarted the Nav and headed back toward Lima.

“I just didn’t expect this from them. It just makes it really hard to believe that they really love me when they’re going to let Stevie and Stacey grow up in a church that hates instead of loves.”

Kurt squeezed his hand before he let go so he could merge back out onto the highway safely.

“PRIDE was great. We had a great time. It was really amazing to see so many people like us. I only know a handful of gay guys. There were hundreds of people there. It was just really cool to not feel so alone. We got our books for the fall too. Sam was really shocked at the prices. Me not so much because I’ve had to pay for textbooks at school before, but our bank accounts are quite a bit lighter now. We did get two free planners though, so at least we won’t have to buy those in the fall.”

“Your answer doesn’t really explain Sam’s mood.”

“Ah, well that has nothing to do with me personally, and it’s his story to tell, not mine.”

“Got it. You know what? Why don’t you and Sam have what I’m making for dinner and your dad and I will go out for a while? You and Sam can relax for a bit while we’re gone.”

Kurt smiled and shook his head. “You’re something else, you know.”

“Maybe. I AM taking lessons on being fabulous from my older son.”

Kurt started laughing. “Better than trying the same thing with your slightly younger son. Basketball shorts and baggy shirts with the sleeves cut off – that’s not really your style.”
This time Carole cackled.

Sam came back down the stairs. “What’s so funny?”

“Kurt was saying that I should never try to rock the jock teen boy summer fashion look.”

Sam laughed. “Basketball shorts and?”

“Baggy t-shirts with the sleeves cut off.”

“Ah, yes. Not really your style, no.”

“We’ll be back later,” Carole said. She went down the hall and dragged Burt out of the house five minutes later. He was still adjusting his cap on the way out the door.

“What was that about?”

“She saw that you were upset and she both gave us time to ourselves and managed to finagle a date out of my date at the same time.”

“She’s awesome.”

“So, let’s eat and then go upstairs for that time alone we’ve been granted.”

Monday afternoon, they were in the doctor’s office waiting room a second time. About 3:00, Sam’s name was called and they went back to the office they had been in earlier that afternoon. Dr. Rouher plopped down on the stool at the small counter.

“Your MRI and symptoms lead me to believe that you have a scapholunate ligament tear. I’ve set you up for surgery Thursday early afternoon. The best prognosis for repairing these types of injuries is to operate in the first week to two weeks after injury, which is why I’ve set your surgery up so quickly. The nurse will give you the information you need about preparing for the surgery and what to expect afterwards. I will do the surgery arthroscopically, which means I will make a very small incision and use tiny tools and a small scope that allows me to see what I’m doing on a screen. The recovery time from arthroscopic surgeries is much quicker than open surgeries. You’ll be in either a cast or different brace afterwards, which will last for a couple of weeks and then you’ll start physical therapy.”

Sam just nodded. “And this will fix the problem permanently?”

“More than likely yes. I can’t make any real assessment of the level of damage until I get a look with the scope.”

“I understand,” Sam said.

“I will see you on Thursday, Sam.” He left the room.

“Oh, God,” Sam said. “I don’t want to have to have surgery.”

Kurt took his hand. “I know, sweetie. I didn’t want you to have to have surgery either.”

The nurse came in and explained all of the pre-op procedures and gave Sam a packet of information to take with him.
Thursday morning rolled around too quickly for Kurt and Sam. Sam was careful to follow all of the pre-op directions. Kurt drove to the hospital in Cleveland. Sam was taken back to a cubicle to change for the surgery. Kurt went with him. Once he was changed, he lay down on the bed and took the medication that he was given. They didn’t have to wait long for Sam to be taken back for the procedure. Kurt had to move to the waiting room with Sam’s stuff.

He closed his eyes and tipped his head back, trying to relax, but it didn’t work. He pulled out the book he had brought with him, but couldn’t focus on that either. He finally gave up and pulled his old iPod out of his bag and put his earbuds in and turned the volume down really low. After what seemed like forever, he heard “Family of Sam Evans” and he got up.

The nurse led him back to a similar cubicle to where he had been earlier and walked away. Kurt put Sam’s bag and his in one of the chairs.

He stood next to Sam and held his left hand. “I’m here, sweetie.”

Sam squeezed his hand back.

Kurt hooked the empty chair with his foot and pulled it toward him. He sat down without letting go of Sam’s hand. He leaned forward and put his other arm across the edge of the bed to rest his head against.

A nurse came in and silently checked on Sam a few times. Kurt realized he had fallen asleep when he heard her say, “Sam, I need you to try to stay awake. Take a drink of water.”

Kurt lifted his head, rubbed his forehead a bit, and sat back in the chair. He smiled at the nurse. “I can do that, if you’d like.”

“You’re welcome to try. He needs to try to wake up.”

“Give me a few minutes and I’ll see what I can do.”

She handed him the cup of water and left.

Kurt stepped closer to the head of the bed and sat on the edge. He leaned down and kissed Sam. “Hey, sleeping beauty, you have to wake up now.”

Sam blinked a few times. Kurt leaned forward and kissed him again.

“The nurse says she needs you to drink a little bit of this and try to wake up.” Kurt held the straw to Sam’s lips.


Kurt laughed. “Asking for more kisses.” He kissed him again. “That’s it until you can keep your eyes open.”

“Mmff. No fun.”

“I have it on good authority that I’m plenty of fun. But you have to be AWAKE for the fun.”

Sam opened his eyes just a bit.

“That’s good. I think once you’re coherent the surgeon can come in and tell us how things went.”
“M’kay. Tired though.”

“Anesthesia will do that to a person.”

The nurse came back. “Oh, good. You were successful. The surgeon wants to come in and talk with you. He’ll be here in about 10 minutes. Do your best to wake up the rest of the way before he gets here. No napping.”

Three hours later, Kurt was standing in line in at the mini-mart at the gas station not too far from home with four Odwalla bottles in his hand. If he had thought ahead, he would have bought them the night before someplace less expensive, but this was the quickest way to get them and get home. He didn’t want to leave Sam in the Navigator alone any longer than necessary. He was two people back in the line when he heard his name spoken by a woman in line behind him. He rotated a bit to see who it was since he didn’t recognize the voice right away.

“How is Sam?”

He answered curtly, but restrained himself from being rude. “He’s waiting for me to come out. We just came back from Toledo. He had to have surgery on his hand. We’ll see by the end of the summer whether he regains full use or not.”

The line moved and Kurt stepped forward. He turned back again. Mrs. Adams looked like she was going to be sick.

“Exactly. So, Azimio and the other three better prepare themselves for some hefty doctors bills. Even when he gets his foot out of that cast, it’s doubtful he’ll be able to go back to work. We’ll just have to see. But his summer glass blowing camp is a bust. He paid quite a bit to attend that camp and it was supposed to be a boost for his college admissions applications. So, he was an athlete, a musician, and an artist. Was being the operative word there. So, while Azimio sits around the house doing whatever he wants, Sam can’t write, use a computer, play video games, play his guitar, draw, or anything. I hope Azimio is counting his blessings that he’s not sitting in the Lima lock-up where he belongs and I hope he gets his head on straight and thinks of something useful to do with his life.”

The line moved. Kurt turned back around and stepped forward again to check out. He paid for the four smoothies, grabbed a straw, and went back to the Nav. He put three of them in the backseat, unscrewed the lid, stuck the straw in, and handed it to Sam. “They had your favorite.”

“Thanks.” Sam took a drink. “It’s really good.”

“Let’s get home before you’re too tired to get up the stairs.”

Kurt didn’t go to camp again Friday. He had a long talk with the director Tuesday at lunch. He rearranged the rehearsal schedule to work on all of the group dancing scenes for the two days that Kurt wasn’t there.

By the early afternoon, Sam was feeling well enough to sit up and play Magic with Kurt. Sam’s pain-killer-induced, slightly diminished thinking skills gave Kurt an advantage and evened the playing field.

“I’m so glad the surgeon didn’t have to use any pins like those papers said he might have to. That means I won’t have to another surgery to take them out in a few months.”
“I’m glad too. Why am I so low on mana? Ugh. You’re going to win if I don’t come up with another idea soon.”

Sam laughed.

“Grab a pick out of the pocket and then bring it over here and sit in front of me.”

Kurt gave him a confused look, but did as he was asked. Sam was sitting in the center of the bed with his arm propped up on pillows. With some wiggling and maneuvering around, Kurt finally ended up sitting the way Sam wanted him to.

“How about we watch *Warehouse 13* again?

“Great idea.”

“Shower first?”

“Definitely. Maybe change the sheets too.”

“I can do that, but you have to get up first.” Kurt helped him out of the bed and into a chair. He
grabbed the sheets from the bed and headed downstairs. He put them in the washer and asked Carole if she could move them to the dryer for him.

When he got back upstairs, Sam had put the plastic arm cover on and was waiting for Kurt to tape it up. By the time they had managed to both get showered and ready for bed, Kurt’s phone alarm went off and he went down to grab the sheets. He brought them back up and remade the bed and helped Sam get in the bed and comfortable. He grabbed his laptop, loaded the DVD, and got in bed with Sam. He scooted up next to him and Sam wrapped his arm around Kurt’s shoulders, pulling him closer.

“I’m tired. Let’s just watch one episode.”

“That’s fine. We can watch more tomorrow evening.”

After the episode was over, Kurt put everything away and turned some music on before getting back into bed. He helped Sam get comfortable and then let himself relax.

“Are you going to keep going to the glass blowing class even though you can’t do much?”

“I’ve decided that I am. I can still learn a lot by watching. It’s not as good as doing, but it’s better than sitting here for 12 hours a day while you’re gone. One day of binging watching TV show episodes will be fun, but lying around all day alone for days on end isn’t my idea of fun. I’d rather watch and learn than lie here and wilt.”

“I think those pain killers have gotten to your brain. Melodramatic much? Wilting? I know what I need to do.” He rolled to his side and put a note on his phone. “Check if the library has what you want tomorrow and put it on hold in my name and I’ll pick it up on the way home if it’s there.”

“Got it.” Sam reached out for Kurt’s hand and found it. He interlaced the fingers. “Thank you for taking care of me.”

“I love you. I know you would do the same for me. That’s what people who love each other do.” Kurt turned on his side and snuggled up behind Sam. He kissed Sam’ neck. “I just want you to know that I mean that.”

“I know. I love you too.”

Kurt left the tray from breakfast upstairs and took the dishes back down. He went back up as soon as he had loaded them into the dishwasher. He put his laptop on the tray and ran the cord across the bed to the outlet in his alcove.

“Now, the battery won’t give out mid-movie. I already loaded the first Lord of the Rings movie. If you go back to sleep for a while, I’ll be back before you even manage to make it through the movie and the special features.” He leaned over and kissed Sam. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Kurt scurried off to the shop to get started for the day. He spent 6 hours working at the shop and stopped by the library on the way home to pick up the item he wanted. What Sam wanted was on hold as well. He checked the new release table for mangas or graphic novels. He grabbed a couple that looked like Sam might like and checked everything out and headed home.

He went straight up to their room and found Sam asleep. He did his best to be quiet and take a quick
shower. It was the time of year where sweating constantly while in the garage was the norm. The A/C couldn’t properly compete with the bay doors opening and closing and the heat outside.

Sam opened his eyes when Kurt came back out.

“I think that’s my favorite outfit of yours.”

“My birthday suit?”

“Exactly. One of a kind and absolutely gorgeous.”

“You’re a sweetie. I thought I could sneak out and get dressed since you were sleeping.”

“No need to get dressed on my account.”

Kurt rolled his eyes. “I’m at least putting my boxer briefs on. I feel weird sitting around in absolutely nothing.”

Sam sighed. “My loss.”

Kurt just shook his head and chuckled. “If you can honestly tell me that you can pay attention to the movie you had me pick up at the library while I’m lying right next to you naked, I’ll leave them off.” Kurt smirked and tipped his head, and then raised an eyebrow.

“You MAY have a point, but I HAVE seen the movie before, so I could still follow along.”

“Maybe another time.” Kurt pulled the underwear on. He grabbed the movie case and retrieved Sam’s *Lord of the Rings* DVD from him and put it back on the shelf.

“Spoil sport.”

He moved the tray and put it on the floor. He crawled across the bed and carefully pulled Sam down so he was reclining rather than sitting up. He unbuttoned Sam’s shirt and began to lick and kiss his way up Sam’s chest and neck, and then kissed him passionately. He worked his way back down.

Once he was finished and Sam was left working to catch his breath, Kurt said, “Spoil sport, huh?”

“Definitely not. Rearrange so I can reach you.”

Once he had regained his ability to walk across the room, Kurt put *Crocodile Dundee* in his laptop. He showed Sam the next *Redwall* audio book he had picked up, and he handed him the graphic novels he picked up from the new release table.

“Ooh. I had forgotten that this was coming out this month. I didn’t think the library would get it so quickly. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome. Do you want to read for a while or go ahead and watch the movie?”

“Start the movie. We’ll watch it. We can read after we watch it and before we go down to eat dinner. I’m eating downstairs. While I love our room, I’d like a change of scenery.”

“I bet. How’s your hand feeling?”

“Meh. Pretty much the same. The pain pills knock the pain down to the point where it hurts just enough to remind me that I need to be careful. Mostly I’m stiff. I’m more tense about moving wrong
than I was before, so I have not moved around as much as I need to.”

“Maybe after dinner we can go to the lake. I know a spot we can go to that we can park close to the water, but not many people would be there early in the evening. It’s more of a fishing spot, but even at that, not many people go there because there’s no dock to fish from.”

“That actually sounds nice. We can watch *Jewel of the Nile* tonight after we come back.”

Kurt fluffed his pillows and sat back against the headboard. Sam scooted over and leaned against Kurt. Once they were both comfortable, Kurt pressed play.

Monday morning, they were both up early getting ready to head to Findlay. “I think Sunday Snuggles are one of our best ideas so far. I like end the week or beginning the week, whichever, just the two of us relaxing together. Can you tie my shoe?”

“Sure.” Kurt took a few steps to the edge of the bed and knelt. “I agree about relaxing together. I love going places and doing fun things together, but I also like the calm and quiet of just being alone together.” He pushed Sam’s feet apart and scooted up to the edge of the bed on his knees.

“Thanks.” Sam leaned down and kissed him. “Are we ready?”

“Yep.” Kurt stood up and grabbed his bag.

On the drive back from Findlay to the shop, Sam said, “The art camp director took me aside today and talked to me.”

“Oh?”

“She said that I can continue to attend the camp and just observe and that they’ll reapply my fees to the fall adult intermediate class that meets on Saturdays. It’s a smaller class, so each person has more time to work on their pieces. And she said I had done quite well and I could skip the adult beginner class because I will have learned what I need to know from the camp. So, at least I’ll get a chance to make something cool like I had hoped and I’ll have a chance to finish the class before it’s time to start sending in portfolios.”

“Well that’s good news. I’m still bummed that you had to have surgery and everything. Those guys are just … well … at least they should leave us alone now.”

“Yeah. I’m glad that the camp is letting me stay and learn and then applying the fees to the fall class. It was pretty expensive, but I do think it’s really cool. How are rehearsals going?”

“They’re fine. Everyone knows their lines and we’ve got the songs and dances down, so it’s looking good. Next week is tech week, so we’ll get to start to see how it’s going to look with the props and the costumes. It’s exciting, I’ve never gotten to do something like this before. I really do like it.”

“I figured you would.”

“I have a surprise for you at the shop.”

“What?”

“It’s nothing super exciting, but I got you a stool. Well, it’s more like a chair with really long legs.”
Sam laughed.

“You can sit next to whatever I’m working on and I can teach you about what I’m doing. I know you can’t actually do any work, but this will still give you something to do that will help down the road.”

“Sounds good to me. Sitting at home not being able to do anything gets old quickly. I’m excited to get my stitches out Wednesday. I’m going to take a nice long shower with my super hot boyfriend without it being quite so much of a hassle. And in a week and a half I get to take this walking cast off. I figure that I might end up in some kind of compression wrap or support something or other, but whatever it is will be better than this cast.”

“Do you still want to go camping?”

“Definitely.”

“Okay. Maybe you can do that while I’m working on something you already know how to do.”

“I can do that.”

When they came in the door from the shop Tuesday night, Carole called out, “You both got something in the mail today. Look on your table.”

“Thanks, Carole,” Kurt called back as they headed up the stairs.

Sam followed Kurt into the room and as soon as he was inside the room, Kurt turned and pushed the door shut with his foot, and blocked Sam from moving into the room. He put his hands on Sam’s chest gently and pushed him back against the door. He reached down and turned the lock. He moved his hands up and placed them gently on the sides of Sam’s face, wrapped around so his fingers were running through the bottom of Sam’s hair. Sam pulled him closer and kissed Kurt.

“Is something wrong?” Sam asked.

“No, not at all. I love you.” Kurt pressed his lips to Sam’s once more. “Let’s see what came in the mail.” He walked across the room to the table. As soon as he saw the box, he knew what it was. He picked it up and slid it under the bed.

“You’re not going to open it?”

“Oh, I know what it is. I ordered ahead. I don’t need it yet, so I’ll just leave it in the box until I do.”

“Okay.” Sam had already looked at his envelope and was hesitant to open it. He took a deep breath. “Let’s see the verdict.” He opened the envelope and took the letter out and read it. His expression change from nervous and worried to a big smile. “I did it. I passed the OGTs. I don’t have to retake them again. I can graduate next year.”

Kurt stepped toward him and hugged him. “You did it. That’s a huge weight off your shoulders, I know.”

“It is. It really is. I’ve had nightmares of not passing them repeatedly and having to repeat my senior year while you’ve gone off to college.”

“Well, no more of that nonsense. We do need to start seriously considering colleges though.”
“We’ll work on it this weekend so we can plan some visits for the week after camp ends. Hopefully, I’ll be walking in two shoes and no walking cast. And maybe no splint or just a tiny hand brace.”

Carole was waiting for Sam when Kurt pulled into the shop parking lot. Sam leaned over the console and kissed Kurt.

“I’ll see you when you get home tonight.”

“I love you. I hope the physical therapy doesn’t hurt too much.”

“We’ll see, but at least I’m stitchless. I love you too. See ya.”

Sam got in Carole’s car and they pulled out of the shop parking lot. Sam had opted to see someone in Lima so he wouldn’t have to continue to drive to Toledo after the camps ended the next week.

“Ready to go to Sam’s Club? You have the flash drive with you, right?”

“I do.”

“Alright. I’ll just wait in the lot while you send the pictures back to get developed. We’ll do the shopping when we come back for them after your session. I’m sure it already feels better with getting the stitches out earlier today.”

“It definitely does.”

It didn’t take too long and Sam was back out and they were on their way to the physical therapist’s office. Carole filled out all of the required paperwork since Sam still couldn’t write. She read a book while the therapist took him back and worked with him.

An hour later, they were on their way back to Sam’s Club. Carole had a list, so they breezed through the store going only to the places they needed to. Once they had gotten through the line and out through the receipt checking area, they two of them loaded all of the food into the bags they brought with them. Carole pushed the cart out and loaded the bags into the car. Sam helped as much as he could.

Once they were back in the car, she asked, “You still want to go to Michael’s right?”

“Yeah. I’ve already picked out what I want and I have the coupon. I just need to grab the stuff and pay for it.”

“I think I’m going to grab a couple of stems of flowers to add to the vase in the living room. It still doesn’t look quite the way I want it to. And I’m going to grab some plates and stuff for this weekend.”

“We can just meet up front.”

As soon as Kurt had left for the shop, Sam got out the things he needed to work on his project. He covered a small area of the desk to keep from getting any paint on it. He worked very slowly, holding the paintbrush between his index and middle fingers, near the hand joint and just lightly balancing it against his thumb. It took him a long time, but he was pleased with the outcome.

He moved to the other end of the table and worked on arranging the photos the way he thought
would look the best. Once he got them arranged and in the frame, he switched tasks and carried their overnight bag downstairs.

He read for a while to give the pieces long enough to dry. Once they were ready, he searched through Kurt’s art supplies until he found a bottle of glue. He let the finished piece lay on the table so the glue could dry and went back to his reading. An hour later, he moved the finished piece to Finn’s room where Kurt wouldn’t see it, but it could continue to dry.

He headed downstairs to do what he could to help Carole get lunch ready. A few minutes before it was ready to serve, Kurt came in through the garage door and rushed up the stairs. Burt loaded everyone’s bags and the food they were taking with them into the car while Kurt was upstairs. When he came back down, they sat down to eat. As soon as they finished eating and cleaned up, the four of them got in the Navigator and headed to Zanesville for the long weekend.

Finn and Kurt were sitting in camping chairs out in the back yard. Stevie and Stacey had called Sam and he went inside to talk to them on the phone.

“I wish I could come see the show live,” Finn said.

“I know. You said so already. It’s okay. It’s a long drive from here and you’d have to do too much driving in a short period of time.”

“How’s your summer going? Is the camp fun?”

“It is. I’m basically just getting paid to play basketball with kids.”

“How about the algebra tutoring?”

“At first I hated it. Like really, really hated it. But once Eric figured out that I never understood what I had learned and he started from the beginning, it’s been a lot better. He’s a lot better at explaining it than my teacher was. I’ve been thinking about what you said about the teachers just giving the jocks C’s whether they deserved them or not. That’s really bad. It seems cool when you can get away without doing much and still made a decent grade, but in the end, I haven’t learned much. You were right about how we had the same classes, but I just didn’t put the effort into learning the stuff. But now, I actually understand the math stuff, so by the time we get through the whole book – he made me get an actual textbook when we started over – by the end of the book I should be ready for the next algebra class in the fall.”

“Well, that’s good.”

“Yeah. He said I should get this vocabulary thing. I gave the paper to Mom. She’s going to get it. It’s a video of some sort.”

“That should help improve your SAT scores.”

“Yeah, that’s what Eric said. It’s almost dark enough to start the fireworks.”

“Dad bought a big pack of ground stuff, no Saturn missals or anything. Your mom said the loud things bother the horses.”

“I like the cones and stuff best anyway. They’re cool to watch.”

“Me too. Do you have the grill lighter?”
“No, but I’ll go grab it and get everyone out here.”

Sam plopped back on the bed. “One more day. It better be healed. I am really, really ready to not wear this thing.”

“Two more days until opening night. I’m nervous. At least all that pigging out on Monday at Aunt Eunice’s didn’t make my costume too tight.” Kurt was pacing around the room. “Tech rehearsals have gone well the last two days. Today was our first dress rehearsal.” He looked at Sam’s shelves as he walked past. “You still need to pack up your pieces for Saturday.”

“You’re right. I did already photograph them. But it’s hard to let them go. I know I can’t keep everything. It’s just deciding which ones to sell is harder than I thought it would be. When it was this future thought of ‘Some day I’ll sell my art.’ – it was fine. But now…”

“I understand. It’s really cool that you can bring extra pieces though.”

“The whole thing is really cool. All of the art camps are going to participate and we get to keep 75% of the selling price and the other 25% goes into the scholarship funds for kids who can’t afford to attend the camps.”

“Part of the ticket sales revenues for the show goes to the scholarship fund too. Each camp participant gets four free tickets for their immediate family and friends and up to 6 more tickets at half price. That way the kids who are there on scholarship can still have their family watch them perform.”

“Very cool. I’m excited to see the show. You’re going to be awesome.”

“You’re biased.”

“Probably, but that doesn’t make me wrong.” Sam sat back up. “I have something for you, but I need you to go in the bathroom for a minute.”

“Oh, wow. I LOVE it. You’ve been busy and sneaky. It’s perfect.” Kurt leaned over and looked at each of the photos. “I love the NEW YORK you spelled out in lime green letters. That’s really cool. And the black frame matches the Wicked poster frame. It fits on the other side of the window, doesn’t it? That’s why you got a tall, narrow collage frame.”

“Yep.”

“Let’s hang it up.”

“That was the part I couldn’t manage by myself.”

“It’s okay. I’ll go get the stuff we need and bring it up.” Kurt came back with a toolbox. He measured and marked the wall, drilled and put the screw anchor in, and then put the screw in. He
picked the frame up and hung it up. “I really do love it. It’s got all of the amazing things we did together in New York where we can look at them and remember.” He turned around and wrapped his arms around Sam. “Thank you.” He kissed him gently. “Sit down. I have something for you too. Close your eyes and hold out your hand.”

Sam sat on the end of the bed with his hand out. Kurt pulled the box off the shelf and opened it. He put what was in the box in Sam’s hand.

“Okay.”

“No way!!” Sam popped up and kissed Kurt. “This is awesome. I hadn’t even checked the release date, but I didn’t know they were out already. This is why you had us start watching the season one episodes again. And we just watched the last one last night. And you say that I’M the tricky one.”

“We’re both tricky, but in a good way.”

“Warehouse 13 marathon?”

“No tonight. How about we watch one tonight, one tomorrow night and then we binge watch the rest over the weekend because the season three premiere is Monday evening.”

“Sounds perfect. Let’s shower and go downstairs and watch it on the big TV.”

Sam walked into the shop and up to the car that Kurt was working on and started to sing.

*I’m free. I’m free at last.*

Kurt looked up and started to laugh. “Freedom looks good on you.”

“Everything has healed up and I’m good to go. The doctor said to take it easy and build up to anything more strenuous than walking. I have to wear an ankle and foot wrap for two weeks because of how badly my ankle was sprained before and then not using it for all these weeks.”

“I’m glad that everything is healed up. You want to watch me change spark plugs or are you going to head home and come back for me later now that you can drive?”

“I’m staying here. Wow me with your spark plug magic.”

“You’re a goof.”

“But I’m your goof,” Sam responded using his best Goofy impression.

“Very true, but you already know how to change spark plugs.” Kurt winked at him.

Sam lowered his voice to the point that it was barely audible. “But you look so sexy doing it …”

Kurt blushed.
Kurt carried Sam’s box of pottery downstairs carefully. Sam brought a few paintings down. They loaded them into the back of the Navigator and went back inside to eat breakfast. Once they had finished eating, Sam cleared the table and loaded the dishwasher while Kurt packed their lunches and put them in the back.

Sam went back up and grabbed the outfit he was wearing to the show that evening and put it in the back as well. They were planning to stay in Toledo after camp let out since the show start time was 6:30.

After Jeff and Sam picked Nick and Kurt up, they headed to the nearest mall to spend a couple of hours relaxing before Nick and Kurt needed to be back at the theater. They wandered through most of the mall, with new socks for Sam being the only purchase before they stopped in the food court for a snack and to rest for a while.

“Next summer, Nick and I are going to have to do some serious shopping. Neither one of us owns much of anything as far as fall and winter clothes go. We’ve gone to private schools with uniforms since we were 12. We own summer clothes, but only a few other things. A couple of pair of jeans, a few hoodies. Not much. We’re at school most of the time wearing Dalton issues clothes.”

“Ooh. I want to go with you. I love a good shopping trip. This is just wandering around somewhere that’s not sweltering while we wait to go back to the theater. This totally does not count as a shopping trip.”

“It’s going to be really weird not seeing the two of you all the time,” Jeff said.

Kurt responded, “We don’t live that far apart. You can come see us and spend the weekend some time. We’re still going to go visit some colleges. We just need to get our choices set and schedule the dates to go.”

“The sooner the scheduling the better. Kurt’s working full time starting next week. I’ve not been released to work still, so I’ll be hanging out watching him and learning still. The earlier we can add the days off to the schedule the better.”

“We’ll make that our priority starting Monday,” Nick said.

They eventually had to give up their lazing around in the food court to go back to the theater.

“Places!” Tammy said firmly, but without raising her voice.

The cast moved to where they belonged and just a couple of minutes later the curtain went up. The auditorium was full and receptive. The show started smoothly with everyone doing their best. The whole show went well from beginning to end. The actors remembered their lines, the songs went well, and the dance pieces looked great. Kurt and Emily made a very believable Tony and Maria.

No one was allowed backstage, but Kurt had brought his camera and Nick took photos of Kurt with
Emily and she took photos of the two of them together. Once Emily moved on to taking photos with other people, Kurt asked Nick to take a few more of him to keep for whatever they might be useful for.

Once they had changed back into their regular clothes, they headed out to the auditorium where Jeff and Nick’s families, Jeff, Sam, Burt, and Carole were waiting for them. They made it through the crowd finally and when they got there, they saw that Aunt Eunice and Finn were there, sitting down next to where Sam, Burt, and Carole were standing.

“Finn! Aunt Eunice!”

“Oh, I see, not even a greeting for your dad.”

Kurt hugged Burt. “Of course, I have a greeting for you.” He let him go and turned back to Finn and Aunt Eunice. “I’m so surprised to see you here.”

“You didn’t think I was going to miss out on your debut did you?” Finn asked.

“It’s such a long drive. I just didn’t think you’d come.”

“Nah. It was like 2½ hours. We came in Aunt Eunice’s car. She has air conditioning and a CD player.”

Kurt laughed.

Aunt Eunice stood up and moved to where she could reach Kurt and hugged him and pinched his check. “You were great, Kurt.”

“Thank you.”

When Aunt Eunice let go of Kurt, Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt from behind and propped his chin on Kurt’s shoulder. Kurt smiled and relaxed back into Sam’s chest.

“You were amazing.”

“You really were, honey. The whole production was really good.”

Jeff and Nick brought their parents over to where Kurt was. After a long round of introductions and compliments, they all headed out to their cars. Sam and Jeff had arranged for everyone to go out together. Jeff had made reservations for a small party room at a local restaurant. Everyone already had the address and directions, so they set out for the restaurant.

Before they got to the restaurant, Burt texted Sam and asked him to meet him at Carole’s car before they went inside. When they pulled into the lot, they parked as close to Burt as they could.

“What’s up, Dad?” Kurt noticed that everyone else had gone inside.

“Carole packed the two of you an overnight bag. We got you two a room at the hotel across the street. Carole changed the sheets in your room so that Aunt Eunice could spend the night. She and Finn will head back early tomorrow morning. This way you don’t have to turn around and drive back here early tomorrow morning for the art show.” He opened the trunk and handed Kurt the suitcase.

“Thanks. I was really surprised they came. And I’m surprised about the room. It’s not that long of a drive, but thank you.”
“You’re welcome. I know your summer hasn’t gone like you had planned and we thought you could use a little relaxation.”

Sam said, “That’s really nice of you. Thanks.”

“Let’s get inside before they think something bad happened,” Burt said.

Kurt pulled the suitcase over to the Navigator, opened the backseat, and put it in. Sam followed behind and was standing right behind Kurt when he turned around from closing the door. Sam pulled him into a hug. Kurt wrapped his arms around Sam and practically melted into him.

“You were great tonight.”

“Thank you. We better get inside.”

Sam stepped back just a bit and kissed Kurt before he turned around and took Kurt’s hand to go into the restaurant.

Kurt and Sam stopped at the front desk and picked up their room keycard. They crossed the lobby and waited for the elevator. Once they were on their floor, they found their room quickly. Kurt opened the door and stepped in, holding it open for Sam. Sam flipped the security lock after he stepped inside.

“Oh, my God, Sam.”

Sam followed Kurt into the bathroom. “Oh, wow.” He stepped back to let Kurt out of the room.

Kurt went and shut the curtains and pulled the covers back on one of the beds. He put their suitcase up on the other bed and opened it. He pulled out the ziplock bags that Carole had packed all of their stuff from the bathroom in. “She obviously doesn’t know about my travel bag under the sink.”

“That’s okay. It looks like she packed most everything. There’s three bags of stuff,” Sam laughed.

“Why are you still dressed?”

Sam laughed. “In a hurry to get me naked, are you?”

“Did you see the same hot tub that I did? I want to sit in there with you. Do you need help getting your clothes off?”

“I think I might,” Sam said coyly.

“Umm hmm.” Kurt walked towards him giving him a sultry look and when he got almost close enough to kiss Sam, he swerved and went into the bathroom.

Sam laughed. “I see.” He started undressing when he heard the water turn on in the bathroom.

Kurt came back just a minute later, stripped stark naked and started to undress Sam very slowly while kissing him everywhere that he uncovered. By the time Sam was undressed, the hot tub was full. Kurt turned the water off and led Sam to the shower.

He gave Kurt a puzzled look. “I want to take the edge off before we get in the Jacuzzi to relax.”
They lay in the dark, listening to a relaxing jazz playlist from Kurt’s phone that was charging next to the bed. Sam was splayed out practically lying on top of Kurt. He had his hand splint off and he was running his fingers all along Kurt’s skin.

“God, that feels good,” Kurt said.

“I agree.” He kissed Kurt’s neck. You feel good. I missed touching you. I may not have regained full use of my hand yet, but I can touch you again and that’s a good start.”

“Touch all you want. I’m all yours.”

Kurt dropped Sam off near the entrance of the art museum, and then drove into the parking lot to look for a space. He walked back up to the building, went inside, and asked where the camp art show was set up. He followed the docent’s directions and saw Sam sitting behind a table with his pottery and paintings on the table and a couple of easels. He waited near the entrance for the exhibit and sale to actually open. When Sam looked his way, he winked at him, which caused Sam to smile.

God, he’s adorable. I am so lucky.

“What put that smile on your face?”

Kurt turned quickly. “Dad! Carole! What are the two of you doing here?”

“You didn’t think we’d miss Sam’s first art show did you?”

“I didn’t really think about it, I guess. You never said anything when we talked about it, so I never thought about you showing up.”

“Well, it’s hard to surprise someone if they know you’re coming,” Carole teased.

“I suppose it is. It opens in five minutes. I’m excited for him. I hope people say nice things, even if they don’t buy something because it’s like the applause after the show last night. People applaud when they appreciate and enjoy what actors do. Artists have it harder because most of the time, they display their artwork in galleries and people browse and look when the artists aren’t there to see how much people like their work.”

“I never thought about it like that,” she said.

Kurt rolled up onto his toes and back down. “I’m just really excited for him. It’s been a rough summer and I just hope this is a positive experience.”

Burt nodded in understanding.

As soon as they were allowed in Burt and Carole made their way to Sam’s table first. He had a huge smile on his face once he saw them.

“I didn’t know you were coming.”

“I just explained the whole concept of a surprise to Kurt, just five minutes ago,” Carole teased.

Sam laughed. “Well, I appreciate you coming.”

“We’ll move along and let potential art-appreciating customers have room to visit your table.”
Sam smiled and nodded.

Kurt followed the two of them as they walked through the room looking at all of the different tables. Carole stopped at one table and picked up a beautiful plum, deep olive, and cream blown glass vase. She took the card that was with it so that she could pay for it at the cashier. They continued to look around. She picked up the card for a really lovely table runner at another table. They walked around some more and she made her last stop back at Sam’s table and took the card for a ceramic piece that was about the size of a large soup bowl, but it was oval. It was glazed in earth tones of olive green, navy, and brown.

Sam tried to keep her from taking the card and said, “You can just have that if you want it, you know. You’ve done so much for me, I don’t want you to pay me for it.”

“Nonsense. It’s a gift.” She managed to keep hold of the card and smiled at him and winked.

She took the three cards and got in line to check out. Burt followed her, but Kurt wandered around a bit more. After she paid, one of the camp participants who wasn’t selling their artwork, went to retrieve the pieces and brought them back up to a table next to the cashier and wrapped them up, put them in a box, and taped it shut. The girl wrote PAID with a red sharpie on the top and handed the box to Carole. She thanked her for supporting the art camps. By the time the process had been complete, Kurt was back waiting near the table.

“I’m assuming you two are heading out then?”

“We are. We’re going to drive out to the beach and enjoy nature for a while first. And then probably a nice lunch somewhere before we drive back. Good luck for your two performances today.”

“Yeah, break a leg, kiddo. You did great last night. I’m sure you’ll be great today. We’ll see you when you get home tonight.”

“Thanks for coming. I know it means a lot to Sam. And to me.”

“You’re welcome, honey. The ceramic piece that Sam made is for Aunt Eunice’s birthday. It’s actually just a few days after Finn’s. You know that plastic bowl of wrapped candy she had sitting on the end table in her living room?”

“Yeah?”

“She used to have this really lovely ceramic bowl that she kept the candy in, but one evening someone was a little too enthusiastic about grabbing for some candy and knocked it onto the floor and it broke.”

“I’m assuming that this someone is lanky and about 5 inches taller than me…”

“Bingo. So, anyway, this was just last summer, mind you.”

Kurt laughed.

“He gave me some money and told me to find a ceramic bowl that Aunt Eunice would like and buy it so he could give it to her for her birthday. So, I did.”

“Alright. I’ll tell Sam, if that’s okay.”

“Sure, honey.”
Kurt followed them out into the hallway and gave each of them a hug before they left. He went back into the room after they left. He walked back down to Sam’s table. He saw that four cards were missing besides the piece that Carole had bought.

“Wow, that was pretty quick.”

“Come around here and sit down with me. You’re going to be tired before your show if you stand up the whole time you’re here.” Sam patted the empty chair next to his.

“I’m fine. I can go sit out in the lobby if I get tired.”

Sam looked both concerned and frustrated. “Why won’t you just sit with me?”

Kurt didn’t answer right away, which gave Sam his answer anyway.

“Kurt, please come sit with me.”

Kurt walked around the end of the table and sat in the chair.

Sam started to reach out, but mid-reach, he said, “Trade me places.”

Kurt looked at him quizzically and stood up and slipped behind him and sat down again. Sam sat down and this time when he reached out, he took Kurt’s hand and interlaced their fingers. Kurt’s eyes flashed as Sam put their hands on his thigh.

Sam lowered his voice until Kurt could barely hear him. “Are you embarrassed for you or for me?”

Kurt didn’t answer.

“If it’s for yourself and you don’t want people to know, then I’ll let go of your hand. Just pull back a little and I’ll let go. But if you’re embarrassed for me, I’m not ashamed, Kurt.” Sam squeezed his hand gently. “I love you and I want to be with you, now and for as long as you’ll have me. If I stick with art, there will be more of these types of events. At least I hope so. And I will want you by my side, just like I’ll come see your shows.”

Kurt nodded. Kurt spoke up and told Sam what Carole had told him about the bowl that she had bought.

“I hope she likes it.”

“I’m sure she will.”

They sat there through the rest of the show talking quietly when no one was looking at Sam’s pieces. Sam interacted with each person who came up to look. By the end, he had three pieces left that hadn’t sold. He went to grab his box and came back.

“I think it went really well. You sold most of the pieces you brought. What do you do now?”

“You can take the box out to the Navigator if you want. I’ll go get in line to get my check and I’ll meet you out front.”

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“So how does it feel to be a successful artist?” Kurt pulled out of the loading zone and drove in the general direction of the theater.
“It actually feels really weird.”

“That’s how I felt last night. I thought I wanted to act, but getting up and doing it made me realize that I really do want to act and perform. It made the whole idea feel real.”

“It does make the idea of being an artist feel more real. My hand is getting better, but I still can’t draw or go back to doing pottery work though, so it’s kind of bittersweet. What if I can’t ever do it again and I just sold off a lot of my pieces?”

Kurt reached out and took his hand. “I hadn’t thought about that. But I don’t think that will be the case. You’re hand is getting a lot better.”

“It is. I know. It’s just so frustrating. It makes me angrier than I was originally – having to go to physical therapy. I mean I want to regain full use of my hand, but sometimes I have flashes of anger while I’m sitting there because the jackasses who hurt me are just sitting around playing games or whatever.”

“Do you wish you had gone through with a trial?”

“Sometimes yes, but usually no. I want them to grow up and stop being awful people. Let’s not talk about them. You have two shows to do today and I had my first successful art sale. I’d say let’s go through a drive-thru and have a picnic, but we don’t have anywhere for you to shower again before the matinee.”

“How about Panera? I know it’s full of evil carbs, but I really want one of those asiago cheese bagels.”

“They have soups and salads too. I don’t have to partake in the evil bagels.”

Kurt laughed. “You can have a bite of mine.” He changed lanes to get in the correct one.

“Deal.”

They parked and went inside. They ordered their food and found a booth to sit in.

Sam slid into the booth next to Kurt. He slid his hand onto Kurt’s leg. “I meant what I said earlier. I know we’ve had this talk before, but I seem to be failing at making myself clear. Or maybe I’m not listening to your body language and I’m forcing you to do things you’re not comfortable with. Either way, we need to talk about it because I don’t want us to misunderstand each other.”

Their buzzers flashed and they slid out to go pick up their orders. Kurt slid back into the booth and Sam sat next to him again when they came back. Kurt picked up his bagel and offered Sam a bite.

“That’s really good.”

“I know. It’s probably a good thing we don’t have a Panera in Lima.”

“Back to what I wanted to talk about…”

“I want all of the romantic things, like holding hands and sitting like this. I think it’s still just in the back of my mind what you’ve already been through and how much being with me has already cost you. And I don’t want to be the cause of you getting hurt ever again.”

“Hey, look at me.” He waited for Kurt to look. “You did not do anything to cause me to get hurt. Ignorant violent people chose to hurt me. And I know there are more of them out there. And I don’t
want you to get hurt either. I will do or not do whatever you want in public, but I want us to be on the same page because when I reach for your hand and you pull it back, it hurts. But if I know you don’t want to hold hands in public, then I won’t attempt it anymore. You were always unwavering in who you were. I just never expected you to reject my affection. Dalton changed you or something did.”

Kurt took a deep breath and let it out. He continued to eat and consider what Sam had said for a few minutes. “You’re right. I hadn’t really thought about it from that perspective. I think I went there feeling like it would be this gay mecca of sorts. I know that’s stupid, but in my tormented state it felt like this amazing place when I first went and spied. And it’s not that I was lied to when Wes told me that everyone was treated equally. It just turned out that most of them were equally distant and the acceptance was more like indifference.”

He paused and ate some more knowing that they had to be at the theater in 45 minutes.

“And the thing was that the behavior was normal to them. I wasn’t being singled out to be ignored. I was just a blazer-clad student like all of the rest of them. And I didn’t like that much more than I liked being bullied. Of course, I liked being safe, but I didn’t like blending in. But I think you might be right that being there changed me. But I’ve also said that I prefer mutual ignoring to being bullied. It’s weird. I know. Sometimes my thoughts don’t make sense even to me. I want this life where I can stand out and be myself and be accepted for that. I don’t want to pick between bullying and indifference. But I know which one is better for everyone involved and it’s indifference. And when I don’t hold your hand or I act like we aren’t a couple, it provides you with acceptance and me with indifference or bullying. Because you don’t ping anyone’s gaydar, if I avoid identifying you as my boyfriend, then I feel like I’m protecting you in a way, I guess.” Kurt went back to eating.

Sam thought about what Kurt said. “I guess what I need to explain is that when you ‘protect’ me in that way, it feels like you are pushing me back into the closet that I worked so hard to get out of. I know I can pass. I know that I can live the rest of my life and not ping anyone’s gaydar. But the truth is that I’m as gay as you are. I’m not a 3 or a 4 or a 5 on the Kinsey scale, even though I know there’s no actual test. I’m not attracted to girls at all. I tried to be a 5 and it wasn’t who I am. I want to be who I am as much as you do. I just decided a little later than you did about it. And just because it takes less effort for me to pass, doesn’t mean that I want to be identified as straight. I don’t want to be perceived as the straight guy who is out to lunch with his gay best friend. I want to be the gay guy who is out to lunch with his boyfriend because that is what I am and what is going on.”

“Oh. I never considered that. I’m really sorry.”

“It’s okay. I know you love me. I knew you weren’t doing anything to hurt me intentionally. I just wanted to get to the heart of the issue and I think we have. And I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are completely capable of passing. Maybe not at McKinley because everyone already knows you and knows that you’re gay. Last night, I didn’t hear a single person say, ‘Oh, that gay boy did a good job of pretending to be straight.’ Or ‘Oh, that gay boy didn’t fool me one bit.’ No one I heard making comments said anything other than what a good job the two lead actors had done.”

“Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For being you. For taking the time to talk through everything instead of just assuming. I will stop rejecting your PDA attempts. It was never my intention to hurt you. I love you so much.”

“I love you too. That’s why I wanted to talk this through because I KNOW you wouldn’t hurt me on purpose. Do you want to try my soup? It’s really good.”
“Sure.” Kurt took the spoon from Sam and ate the bite he was offered. “That is good. Maybe I’ll order that next time. Try mine.”

Sam took a bite of Kurt’s. “I like that too. You’re definitely right that we’re better off without a Panera in Lima. We’d get lazy and our wallets would get much too light.”

Kurt laughed. “We need to get going soon, so I’m not late.”

They finished up quickly.

“I’ll clear our plates, while you get us refills.”

“Good plan.”

Sam was waiting in the auditorium for Kurt to come out after the evening show. A couple that he didn’t recognize walked up to him.

The woman said, “Your boyfriend did a really great job. Emily has had a great time working with him. He’s been so professional and helpful when she was nervous.”

Sam smiled. “I’ll tell him you said so.”

“Oh, we told him ourselves after the matinee this afternoon,” the man said. “I’m glad to see that the two of you are happy and out. My brother is gay and there was no way for him to be out like the two of you are. He’s in California now with his partner. They were hoping to get married, but with the Prop 8 stuff, it hasn’t happened yet. One day though. Don’t give up. New York is so close to legalizing it. It won’t long now, at least there. Hopefully soon everywhere.”

Sam smiled and nodded.

“Your boyfriend’s a nice kid, well teen or whatever,” he laughed. “You know what I mean. He’s a good actor and a great singer according to Emily. She said he didn’t get to show off his range. I guess they goofed around or did improv or whatever singing songs from Wicked together.”

“Kurt loves Wicked. We got to see it on Broadway when we went to New York for the Show Choir Nationals back in May.”

“Emily would love to go see it on Broadway.”

Kurt and Emily walked up.

“I would, I would. When Kurt told me that you two had gone, I was so jealous. I will see it, somehow,” she insisted.

“It was fantastic. You’ll love it,” Sam said.

She stepped closer to Kurt and hugged him. “You were a great Tony. Text me when you’re coming to town. Bring Nick and Jeff too. Thomas and I can meet you and we can hang out.”

“I’ll do that. We’re going to go camping in a week and a half at Maumee State Park. So, if you like to camp, maybe you can join us.”

“Ooh. I do like to camp and we have a tent. I’ll have to twist their arms,” nodding her head toward her parents, “to let me and Thomas go.”
“We could probably be persuaded since it wouldn’t just be the two of you. You know it has nothing
to do with you being alone with Thomas. It has everything to do with you being alone in a tent in the
campgrounds if he has to go to the bathroom or something. It just makes us nervous.”

“I know. Anyway, we do like to camp. I’ll text you to get details and see if Thomas can go. I’d ask
him, but he left with his family already. We’ll talk soon.” She hugged Kurt one more time and waved
as she followed her parents out of the auditorium.

“Ready to go?” Sam asked.

“I am.” He reached for Sam’s hand and interlaced their fingers. “It’s hard to believe it’s over.” As
they walked out, Kurt stopped before they got very far. “Come back this way.”

He stood them in front of the West Side Story poster and wrapped his arm around Sam’s waist. Sam
put his arm up around Kurt’s shoulders. Kurt took a few selfies of them together.

“Now, I’m ready.”

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When Kurt and Sam came in close to 10:30, Carole was sitting in the living room reading a book.

“There’s leftover soup in the fridge if you two are hungry.”

“Thanks. We’re pretty tired. We’ll eat it for lunch tomorrow. We’re staying home all day.”

“That’s fine. How did today’s shows go?”

“They were both really good,” Sam answered.

“They both went well. I’m sad it’s over though. It was a lot of fun.”

“Well, you dad and I really liked it. Go ahead up and sleep. I’m going to keep reading for a while.
Burt’s downstairs watching a sporting event. I’ve lost track – baseball I guess.”

Kurt laughed. “Good night.”

“Night.”

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Kurt carried the suitcase up the stairs and down the hall into their room. He shut the door and locked
it behind them. He put the suitcase down in front of the center shelves. He reached out for Sam
before he moved very far. He caught his forearm. Sam stepped closer to him. Kurt used his other
hand to turn some music on.

“Dance with me?”

Sam couldn’t turn him down. With the cast and brace on, it had been ages since they had danced
easily. “Yeah, of course. Let me grab the light.” Sam turned the overhead light off and turned a
single lamp on instead. He walked back and opened his arms to Kurt.

Kurt stepped closer and wrapped his arms around Sam’s torso and leaned in started to place small
kisses on Sam’s neck. Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt’s waist. Kurt kissed up his neck until his
mouth was hovering over Sam’s ear.
“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Kurt kissed down Sam’s jaw line and then connected their lips. They kissed gently as they mostly just swayed in place. After a couple of songs, Sam stepped back.

“How about we shower and snuggle?”

“A most excellent idea.” He leaned forward and pecked Sam on he nose, making him laugh. Kurt opened the suitcase and pulled out the ziplock bags and took them to the bathroom. “Do you want the shower stool still or can I take it out of the tub?”

Sam peeked in the bathroom. He had already stripped down to his underwear. “Well, it served more than one purpose.” He winked at Kurt.

Kurt laughed. “I know. That’s why I asked if you wanted me to take it out or not.”

“Set it on the floor next to the tub. That way we can still use it if we want to. We can keep it in the shower when we get done so it’s not in the way on the floor.” He walked up behind Kurt and started unbuttoning his shirt.

Kurt leaned back into Sam’s chest and let him. “I’m ready for our Sunday snuggles. It’s been a hectic week.”

“It has. And for the first time in too many weeks, I can lie around and not have a cast or a brace or splint on. I vote for birthday suit snuggles.”

Kurt laughed and slid his arms out of his shirt. “You win. As long as we trade positions at some points so that I get to be the one you lean back against while we resume our Warehouse 13 marathon.”

“Deal.”

“Good morning, boys,” Carole chirped happily as they all sat down for breakfast.

“Morning,” Sam said.

Kurt just smiled. “Thanks for making us breakfast. You didn’t have to.”

“Oh, I know, but I like to every now and then.”

“Well, it looks delicious.”

Everyone started to serve themselves, passing the food around. Once they had taken what they wanted, they started to eat.

“How are Finn and Aunt Eunice? We didn’t get to talk to them much Friday evening.”

“Nothing has changed since we were there a week ago. Finn’s still working and still going to tutoring. Aunt Eunice is doing her thing like always,” she laughed.

Sam asked, “Was she married at some point?”
“Nope. I’ve never actually asked her why. I figured if she had wanted me to know, she would have told me by now. She’s not big on hiding things from people though, so I always just figured that she wasn’t interested. She’s always loved kids though. She was everyone’s favorite aunt. With her tall lanky build, and her natural athleticism, she was always more fun to play with than our own parents. Of course, I realized as an adult that she was more fun because she didn’t have the responsibilities that our parents had. She had time to chase us around and play with us because she did it on a limited basis. She didn’t have two or three kids of her own to watch while she was playing with us. She didn’t have homework to look over or school lunches to pack for the next day or any of that other stuff. When she came over or we went over there, we became the center of attention because she didn’t have anyone else vying for her attention.”

“Yeah. I get that. I know it’s hard on my parents to have time for me because my little brother and sister demand their attention. It does get old though.”

“You haven’t been to see them in a while. You went what three weeks ago?” Burt said.

Sam nodded.

“I figured once school was out, you might head down there for a week or two a couple of times over the summer.”

“Yeah, well that had been in the back of my mind as well, but things are different.”

“Different?” Carole asked.

Kurt didn’t say anything as he slid his hand over under the table and put it on Sam’s leg.

Sam closed his eyes for a few seconds and took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “My parents are living in a very conservative small town. The largest church in the area is where all of the socializing in the town seems to happen. Stevie’s Boy Scout troop meets there. Some Girl Scout alternative group meets there. It has an active youth group. All the ladies my mom works with go there. And it’s a ‘gays are sinners that will burn in hell’ kind of church.”

“Oh, no,” Carole’s eyes flashed with anger and pity at the same time.

“So when Kurt and I went to visit, they informed me that they had not told Stevie and Stacey that Kurt and I were dating after they moved. They think we were just best friends. They forbade me to tell them myself. They don’t want either of them accidentally mentioning their older brother’s boyfriend and then end up being ostracized by the other kids their age, both at church and at school.”

“Oh, honey. I’m so sorry to hear that.”

“And the church doesn’t just preach it from the pulpit, they actively protest. There was a sign up sheet in the foyer for the youth group and any adults interested in chaperoning them to go to the Cincinnati Pride parade and protest.”

“That’s why you were so upset and came back early when you went to visit.”

“Yes. And I haven’t heard from them since. I know they’re busy and I’m the one who has been the one to make the effort, but it gets old. I’m not a child, but I am their child and always having to be the one to take the initiative and put for the effort is tiring. I know it’s a passive/aggressive move for me to ignore them for three weeks, but I just wanted to know if they cared enough to even contact me. And it seems like the answer is no. My mom said to call with updates on how my foot and hand were doing, but when I haven’t, she hasn’t called to see. I know they operate under the ‘no new is good news’ philosophy, but still…”
“I get it, Son. You feel like your brother and sister are their priority and now that you’re living on your own that they’ve just stopped caring.”

“I think it’s just the combination of them refusing to let me be myself and the other stressful things that have happened. Before, I wasn’t so upset about them not being the ones who called. I’m sure they just got used to me being the one to initiate, and with their busy schedules they just left it to me. But I guess I just figured all that time that if I didn’t call, they would contact me instead. But I guess that hasn’t been the case. I just don’t know what to think or feel about it, other than sad and disappointed. They always told me that they were proud of how hard I worked, even when I was never a good student grade-wise. They were proud that I was a man of my word and that I was trustworthy. But now, they want me to hide who I am in order to be part of their lives. It’s just hard, but I’d rather not talk about it anymore right now.”

“Sure, honey. How did the sale go yesterday?”

“Oh, I sold 7 of the pieces that I took. That reminds me that we didn’t bring the box in last night.”

“That’s quite a few,” Burt said.

“It was cool to see people come up and actually like things I’ve made. It made it feel like maybe I could be a successful artist – if I regain full use of my hand.”

“Hopefully the therapy will continue to help with that,” Carole said.

“Yeah, I hope so. I have 6 weeks before school starts again and I enrolled in those art classes at OSU-Lima. I really hope I don’t have to withdraw and take more classes at McKinley instead.”

“I hadn’t thought about that,” Carole said.

Burt said, “I’m assuming you’re not going to play football this fall.”

“No, I’m not. I was on the fence before the incident, but I’ve decided against playing now that I’ve really focused more on considering art as a career.”

“Makes sense,” Burt said. “I know Finn’s excited for football camp.”

Carole said, “I think he’s mostly excited because that’s something he can think about that signifies the end of working off his debt and being able to come back to Lima. He’s missed hanging out with his friends.”

“The downside to growing up,” Kurt said. “Having to work for money.”

“I think he’s finally realizing a lot of things that you two learned a long time ago. I didn’t do him any favors babying him, but at the same time, he’s always just seemed to need longer than some kids to catch on to stuff.”

“As long as he figures most of it out before he moves it, that’s good enough,” Kurt said. “No one asks anyone our age how old we were when we learned to tie our shoes. Some things just become irrelevant once you know how to do them. Once we’re old enough to get our own places and look for jobs in the fields we want to work in, no one is going to ask us how old we were when we learned to wash our own clothes.”

“That’s a good point,” she said. “I just have to get him to move a little quicker than he has been, but I think it will be a lot easier when he comes back because Aunt Eunice isn’t me and he couldn’t just wait her out like he did me. I couldn’t bear to let him go to school wearing dirty clothes, so I would
wash them myself rather than let him suffer the consequences of being teased or shunned or maybe some teacher deciding to call CPS. But now that he had to do that stuff for himself all summer, I’m not going to fall back into the trap of doing things for him that he can do for himself. Facing the consequences will fall on his shoulders. He’ll be 18. No one can come to me and say ‘Why don’t you bathe your kid or wash his clothes?’ Now someone will just tell him that he’s gross.”

Kurt laughed. “He is so cute though. I mean I got over my crush on him ages ago, but I can see how he could use that against you so easily. It works so well for him. He puts in a tiny bit of effort, and then convinces other people to help him. He’s like the poster child of a figurehead leader. Everyone likes him. He’s nice. And he can get everyone to do everything for him.”

She laughed. “That sounds about right.”

“You two have any plans for today? I saw you marked tomorrow off.”

Kurt answered, “We’re just tired. We’re going to be lazy and lie around all day reading, watching videos, maybe playing some games, stuff like that.”

“And tomorrow?”

“More of the same, plus the stuff we haven’t had time to do, like laundry, cleaning, and more lazing around after that.”

“I saw you took days off next week too.”

“Yeah, we’re finally going to go camping,” Sam said. “By the time I went to make reservations, the weekends were full, so we had to go with mid-week dates.”

“Is it a problem? No one else had those days marked off.”

“No, it’s fine. I didn’t think about how you had to wait to see how Sam was doing to make the reservations. I was just figuring you’d go on a weekend.”

“I’ll go in and work on that Saturday when we get back if something happens and things get behind at the shop.”

“That’s fine. Are you going to be able to start working again soon, Sam?”

“Not doing the things I wanted to do. I could come in and do the customer service stuff, if you need someone.”

“I’ll see what I can figure out.”

Kurt took his and Sam’s stuff to the kitchen and started loading the dishwasher. Carole followed behind with the empty platters. She put them in the sink to wash. Kurt went back to check to see if anything had been left behind and grabbed Burt’s stuff.

“I really like that table runner you bought yesterday. I didn’t see it up close then, but someone did an amazing job of picking out fabric in just about every color possible and piecing it together so it looks nice. It will go with every color table cloth or decorations for any season.”

“That’s why I liked it. That table is really long and it always just looked so empty, but I honestly didn’t want to have to change it seasonally, so I never ended up picking anything out for it. But I do like it a lot.”
Kurt washed the platters and Sam dried them. Once they were done, they went back upstairs.

“I think that has to be one of the most infuriating artifacts they’ve encountered so far. When you can’t even plan for when you’re going to switch back and forth, it would be so weird and incredibly frustrating. When they switched at the reunion, it made me thing about myself. I feel like I’m like Myka – always the one who doesn’t know how to fit into a conversation.”

“Just so you know, I might be more of the man’s man kind of guy based on my looks, but I feel the same. I can wing it and fake it better than you can because I actually know the rules of the games really well from playing them, but I suck at statistics and remembering names to go with the statistics. I’m a very visual person, so I remember names and details to go with movie and comic book characters, but to remember all those stats about guys who are always in uniform, blocking me from seeing their faces and wearing jerseys with their names and numbers, which get jumbled in my mind… I just go along with the conversation nodding and chiming in on the rare occasions when I can say something specific that I know is right. I know more about surrealist artists and painters than I do about professional football players.”

“So, you’re just good at faking being interested.”

“Pretty much. I like to play sports and I like being part of a team, but I’m not actually a huge fan of professional sports.”

“I’m understanding more about what you said yesterday.” Kurt rotated from his position of leaning back on Sam and put his legs over Sam’s right leg and turned so he was leaning his right shoulder against Sam’s chest. He slipped his hand between Sam’s back and the pillows and put his head on Sam’s left shoulder. “I’m sorry I’ve been making it harder on you. It was misguided, but I never meant to hurt you.”

“I know you didn’t.” Sam kissed Kurt’s forehead. “But that’s why I had to bring it up and figure out what was going on. That whole mentality of jocks being too manly to be gay and that I’m somehow doing the women of the world an injustice by not being available to them is annoying. I am absolutely as gay as you are. My interests may not intersect with as many so-called ‘feminine’ interests as yours do. But seriously, we are both lying here in our birthday suits much to my pleasure. I can’t get any gayer than that.”

Kurt laughed. “I’m pretty sure that you don’t want a t-shirt that says that.”

“Oh, but that would be a fun thing to wear. ‘I like my boyfriend’s birthday suit.’ Nothing obscene. … Hmm … I wonder how long it would take before I was asked to change my shirt.”

“You wouldn’t wear that to school.”

“Only because it would embarrass you. That was one of the more annoying things about being outed – girls looking at me like they were aggravated. It’s probably the closest thing I’ll ever feel that’s similar to what really pretty girls and girls that are considered unattractive go through. Having people look at me like that. Girls looking upset that I’m not available and guys ignoring me to the point of intentionally refusing to make eye contact with me.”

“But your parents’ reactions have been weighing on you and then I’ve been weird. And the stress of your injuries. I get it now. You don’t have to wear the birthday suit t-shirt.” Kurt placed a single gentle kiss on the side of Sam’s neck.
“I might make one and wear it in Glee one morning though, under a button up and just unbutton my shirt during class. If the guys are going to continue to ostracize you for being gay, then they can do the same to me. If you’re not welcome, then I don’t want to hang around with them. I know it’s my fault that I lied. But that’s over. I lied because I was new and wanted to be accepted, but being accepted doesn’t feel as good as I thought it would, like at all. Hiding made me feel on edge all the time. It’s possible that I’ll still feel on edge, but at least it won’t be because I’m hiding something. And I’m not being critical of people staying in the closet. Not at all. We all have to decide what’s right and what’s best individually. And for me now, it’s being out. I will never do anything to out Karofsky. They would probably go after him even more than they came after me. I was new and barely spent any time in the locker room with them compared to Karofsky. I can absolutely see why he will stay closeted. Plus, he’s really good at it. From what I’ve seen he’s actually really into all that so-called ‘masculine’ stuff. He doesn’t have any interests like art or Broadway or anything. He’s into math and science and everything sports related.”

“I hope he’s doing okay. He doesn’t have much longer until he’s 18. But I am sure that his closet door is locked tight after what they did to you.”

Sam switched the topic. “Are you ready for the next episode?”

“I want to trade places first. I want my turn at having my hands all over you.” Kurt moved to the side and let Sam slide up so he slip in behind him.

“Better?” Sam asked, as he got ready to press play.

“Neither way is better. I love both ways. I just want my turn to pamper you.”

“Mmm. Ready?”

“Yes.”

Sam pressed play.

“Ooh. I have a better t-shirt idea,” Sam said.

“How did you come up with a t-shirt idea while we’re packing for our camping trip?”

“It’s the cereal box’s fault. I saw it when I opened the cabinet to get the cereal bars out.”

“What cereal box?”

Sam pulled the corn flakes box out, showed it to Kurt, and put it back.

Nothing came to Kurt’s mind. He kept thinking for a while and he continued to pack food in a bag.

“Alright, I give up.”

“I’ll paint a rooster on the center of the chest area playing a guitar and underneath, I’ll write ‘Cocks Rock’.”

Kurt burst out laughing. “That one is even better than the first one.”

Carole came into the kitchen from the living room where she had been reading. “I love the sound of laughter. Do tell. What’s so funny?”

“I’m not sure you want to know,” Kurt said, who starting laughing again.
“Oh, now I have to know.”

“Just remember you asked.”

She nodded.

Kurt explained it to her.

She started laughing before he even finished. “Go for it. If the school calls here, I’ll play dumb and act like I have no idea why there’s anything wrong with your shirt.”

“Aren’t you supposed to be telling us to behave?”

“You already behave just fine, both of you. The shirt isn’t indecent and it’s a funny way for Sam to get his point across.” She saw the time on the stove. “I better get moving. I have to be at work in an hour. It’s off to the shower for me. I’ll see you two Friday when you get back. I hope you have a great time.”

“Thanks.”

A half-hour later, they were pulling out of the driveway headed to Maumee Bay State Park.

“So, what do you think of Jinks?”

“I think he’s an interesting addition to the group. I can see how he would be an asset, but I totally would not want his special ability. I can see how it would be really cool as an agent though. But knowing every time someone is lying would be so annoying. As an actor, it would be really hard. I have to get into this zone where I feel like I am the character and if every time I looked into a fellow actor’s eyes, I could feel them lying I think it would throw my focus off.”

“I was thinking more along the lines of him being gay.”

“Oh. I guess I’ll have to wait and see. It doesn’t seem like a big deal at this point, which would be perfect. I hope he’s just gay and that’s just part of who he is, and they just go on with their missions.”

“I know you’re new to the whole sci fi scene, but it’s a big deal in a way. I know Warehouse 13 is nothing like Star Trek, but for as long as Star Trek has been around, there’s never been any gay characters, and definitely not a main cast member. I mean there was that time that Jadzia kissed a former spouse, and that caused a huge uproar from my understanding, but that wasn’t really a lesbian kiss and they didn’t become a couple on the show. I hope it’s just like you said. Jinks is gay, and then they just go on with things. You know, he does his job as the human lie detector and collects artifacts like the others. No big deal.”

“I don’t know who Jadzia is or what you were referring to, but I guess it both surprises me and doesn’t that there haven’t been any gay characters on Star Trek. It’s supposed take place so far in the future and be amazingly fair and there’s no poverty and stuff, but I guess it was too much to think that gays would be accepted in the future.”

“I read somewhere that when Uhura and Kirk kissed that some southern states actually blocked the episode or the scene or something. So, things were really different back then. I did think that by the time that the Next Generation came around that there would at least be some gay background characters, not speaking roles or anything, but just like when people are walking around on the ship that you’d see a same-sex couple, or like in Ten Forward you’d see two guys on a date or something.
Just in the background, maybe not even completely in focus. Just there, like it was nothing to notice. That would have been really perfect. Gay couples just existing in the future like straight couples – nothing to see here.”

“Maybe some day. I thought the part where the father took his son’s illness was really realistic. I could totally see my dad doing something like that, especially after seeing me have to go on after losing my mom. I liked how they did nothing to the father. That allowed the son to go on with his life without feeling the guilt of knowing what his dad had done for him.”

“I hadn’t thought about that part, but you’re right. If the son had known, it would have changed how he felt about getting better and made it hard for him to enjoy his recovery.”

Their conversation continued and made their drive pass quickly. They pulled into the state park and found a place to park. They registered and picked up their tags for their camping spot and their wristbands. Once they had everything set, they drove over to the camping area and met up with Emily, Thomas, Nick, and Jeff.

Nick and Jeff had left their car at Emily’s house on the way into town and loaded their camping stuff into the back of Emily’s dad’s truck. There were only two parking spots available per campsite, so they rode together from Emily’s house to the state park. They found their spots and parked.

They all got out and Kurt and Jeff started to move all of the stuff from the Navigator to Emily’s dad’s truck bed. Once it was moved, Emily locked the camper top. Kurt put down the third row seating and Emily and Thomas climbed in. Nick and Jeff got in and Kurt drove them to the parking area near the lakefront. They could have walked, but it had not even been quite a week since Sam’s cast had come off. He wanted to save his walking for the scenic walk through the woods, not just huffing it all the way across the park.

They spent the morning sitting around on the beach, wading, and just enjoying the scenery and talking. College was a huge topic of conversation since they were all starting their last year of high school soon. At lunchtime they headed back to the Navigator to pull out the coolers they had packed. They took their lunches and found an empty picnic table and sat down to eat.

“I’m really interested in seeing that list of Ohio colleges that allow mixed-sex roommates that you mentioned. I think that might give us a starting point to consider different places than we might have previously considered,” Kurt said.

Emily asked, “Why would mixed-sex roommates make a difference to you? You and Sam can be roommates no matter what.”

“Because to me it signifies that the school is more opened minded to sexuality in general. Dorms used to be same-sex period. Guys weren’t even allowed in girls’ buildings and the same was true in reverse. But if a school is willing to allow mixed-gender roommates, it just seems like it might be less homophobic in a weird roundabout way.”

“I get it. I’ll text you the link to the website where I got the list.”

“You said you had you been here before?” Sam asked Emily and Thomas.

Thomas answered. “We’ve both been to the beach area with my parents, but we’ve never stayed and done anything like boating or hiking.”

“Well, hiking is next on our agenda. We’re not going to attempt to stay with the four of you,” Kurt said. “We’re going to play it by ear. But if we come back early, we’ll just go back down to the
beach. Don’t rush on our account. It’s supposed to be a vacation.”

Kurt and Sam found an area to sit along the path to take a break for a few minutes.

“Can I see the list of colleges that Emily sent?”

“Oh, sure.” Kurt opened his phone and showed the list to Sam. “There are some on there that we hadn’t considered. We really need to spend this weekend actually researching the places we’re considering. We’ll make a big spreadsheet or something.”

He looked the list. “A chart’s a good idea. I bet some of the places have set dates that they do big events. It might be nice to go to those.”

“It seems like a such a long way off, but we have to get started. I wonder if you can get extra time on the SATs like you did on the state tests.”

“I need to find that out because if it is possible, I bet it takes a long time to set up.”

“They might even need a newer diagnosis or a letter from the school, but you’re right about needing to find out. You can send Mrs. Huntington an email. I bet she can tell you exactly how to get started.”

“I’m sure she can. She’s a great person to have on your side in an argument.”

Kurt laughed. “That’s for sure.” He leaned towards Sam and put his head on his shoulder. “It’s peaceful here.”

“I remember the first time you took me out for a hike in the woods.”

“Mmm hmm. Me too.”

Sam shifted slightly and gently turned Kurt’s face towards him and kissed him. He wrapped his arm around Kurt’s shoulders. Kurt leaned back into Sam’s shoulder. They sat quietly listening to the birds for a while.

“Thomas reminds me of a non-Asian version of Mike,” Sam said. “He has the same build and he’s a really good dancer.”

“You’re right. He does. He’s also pretty quiet in a group, but he loves to perform. Emily is like a combination of what Rachel thinks she is with Brittany’s spunky personality and Quinn’s intelligence and general build.

“What do you mean by what Rachel ‘thinks she is’?”

“Rachel fancies herself to be this triple threat – singer, dancer, actress. But right now, she’s mostly just a singer, just like me. Neither of us have had enough training or experience to consider ourselves to be actors or dancers. There’s no dance training in Lima like there is in big cities where junior high and high school students can study at a competitive level. And in larger cities, there are community theater groups where kids as young as elementary school can audition and be in real plays and musicals. We’re going to be competing for spots as musical theatre majors against people who have grown up in those places, like Emily. She’s been in a lot of productions – ever since she was a kid. She’s studied ballet since she was three. She’s been in the Toledo Symphony’s production of The Nutcracker for years. She’s played Clara when she was 12 and 13. She played the Sugar Plum fairy
last year. Rachel and I may have a lot of raw talent, but that’s what it is – raw. There will be people we’ll be auditioning against will have honed their talent. People who have been performing as frequently as Emily, who have been dancing basically professionally, and people who’ve had voice lessons from real voice teachers for years.”

“That doesn’t mean you’re giving up does it?”

“No, but after meeting everyone this summer, I realized that even though I was really upset about places in New York being out of my price range for schools, that maybe it’s better for me to go to a less prestigious school, but one that offers good training. Once I’m auditioning for roles, graduating from a prestigious school may not be as important as it would be in other fields. With auditioning, what I do to show that I can be the character will have more of an impact on whether I get the role than where I went to school. I can move to New York and start to audition at the same time as someone who is my age and goes to college in New York, but the difference for me personally will be that I can start out without being so far in debt that I can’t afford to stay in New York long enough to get a role in anything. Just paying to live there will be difficult enough. I’d have to work like 60 hours a week to pay back the loans and my living expenses. And that would be with sharing the expenses. And even that might not be enough. But if I go to New York without that debt hanging over my head, I’ll be able to work maybe 25 hours a week or so, leaving me enough time to actually audition for roles.”

“You’ve been thinking about this a lot again haven’t you?”

“I have – since the end of the play. While we were working on it and I was there every day, it kept my mind pretty busy and I was worried about you and after you got your cast off and your hand was better and the musical ended, thoughts of the future came back in full force and whacked me upside the head.”

Sam laughed and kissed Kurt above the ear.

“What was that for?”

“The invisible knot you must have on the side of your head from being hit with something so heavy.”

“Very funny. You’re adorable, you know. I love you. Thanks for kissing my invisible booboo.”

“Any time. And I love you too.”

“You never really say much when I talk about all of the college stuff.”

“Because I’m going to go wherever you do. I told you that I had only half-heartedly considered college and I don’t have any giant aspirations of being rich or famous. I just want to be happy. I want to be able to get a job, pay my bills, live with the person I love, maybe get a couple of dogs, and do what I can to enjoy my life. And I can do that anywhere that you are. If I can get into college and study art without hocking my future, then I will do that. If I can’t, I can’t. I’ll just get a job doing whatever I can and share our living expenses and create art as a hobby. Not every artist who has stuff in galleries or goes to art shows has a college degree in art. I can save up and take lessons or pay for individual classes at whatever school you go to. I don’t have to be a full-time, degree-seeking student to take a class or two each semester. I just have to be able to afford the cost of the classes.”

“You’re sure? You’re not just saying that to make me happy or something.”

“T’m saying it because it’s what I want. I don’t want to stay in Lima if you’re not going to be there
and I’m certainly not interested in living where my parents live in Kentucky. If you break up with me, then I’ll have to figure out if I want to stay wherever I am at the time, but I’m hoping that doesn’t happen. I really love you.”

“I love you too. I just don’t want you to follow me somewhere and then end up resenting me and being miserable.”

“We get along. We already live together. I really don’t see an issue. I know things can be rough, but I’m not a giver-upper.”

“Me either. Are you ready to head back to the Navigator?”

“Too bad it’s too hot to sit in the back seat and make out.”

“That’s on the agenda for later.”

“Mmm. I had hoped so.” Sam stood up. “Come on then.”

Kurt stood up and kissed Sam quickly, and then he wrapped his arm around Sam’s waist and Sam did the same. They followed the path back out of the wooded area. When they got to the Navigator, no one else was there yet.

“I have an idea. Let’s put all of the windows down and climb into the third row seats. We’ll get the breeze blowing through, but no one will be able to see us because the back windows are tinted.”

“Good idea.”

A few minutes later, Kurt was straddling Sam lap with his arms wrapped around Sam’s neck and they were kissing quite passionately.

About 10 minutes later, the other four walked up to the SUV.

Nick said, “They have to be around here close by. Kurt would never roll down all of the windows and just walk away.”

Kurt broke away. “We’re in here.”

Jeff opened the back door and started laughing when Kurt hadn’t quite managed to get turned back around facing the front. “I see. Taking advantage of an empty vehicle.” He folded the backseat down so that Kurt and Sam could get out.

They got in the front and Nick and Jeff climbed into the third row seats, leaving the backseat for the Emily and Thomas.

Jeff asked, “So, we’re off to the lake to go boating or swimming?”

“Whatever you’re in the mood for,” Kurt said. “Sam and I are going to swim. He’s not able to row yet and I don’t think I’m strong enough to do it by myself.”

Later that evening Sam was in charge of the grill while the other five set up the tents. Once everything was set up, they others helped assemble their dinner and they all sat down together to eat.

“So, who’s up for some card games before it gets dark?” Sam asked.
“Sure,” Thomas answered.

“You know we’re in,” Jeff said.

Sam grabbed a deck of Uno cards and shuffled them. They played for a while, and then switched to poker. Once it got dark, they put the cards away.

Kurt said, “I usually play music when we fall asleep, is that going to bother anyone? Usually it’s classical or jazz.”

“Nope, doesn’t bother us,” Nick said.

“Us either,” Emily said. “I listen to music at night too. You might hear ours too. It shuts off after an hour though.”

“Okay. I’m not sure that you’ll even be able to hear it, but I didn’t want to bother anyone. We’ll see you all in the morning.”

They said their good nights and headed into their separate tents.

Sam zipped the tent up and made sure the zipper was fastened. He undressed as soon as he turned around. Kurt had already gotten started.

Sam spoke in a whisper. “The breeze off the water helps it not be so hot. But I am not sleeping in any clothes.”

Kurt patted the sleeping bag for Sam to lie down. Once he did, Kurt said, “You won’t need clothes for what I want to do. But we will need the music and for you to do your best to keep quiet.”

They spent the next two days swimming in the lake, the indoor pool, the outdoor pool, boating, and hiking, some more than others. Kurt and Sam spent time playing Magic when the other four went out on longer hikes. On Friday, they had to check out of the camping area by 2:00, but they stayed in the park until about 6:00.

They stopped and ate dinner with Nick and Jeff in Findlay before they drove the rest of the way back to Lima. When they got there, Kurt unloaded the Navigator and Sam started their laundry. By the time Kurt got everything put back where it belonged, Sam had moved the clothes to the dryer.

“Let’s go up and shower while the clothes dry. I have to get up really early to go to work. We can come back down for them after we shower.”

“Sure.” Sam had already loaded the containers they had taken with them into the dishwasher and turned it on.

An hour later, they were in bed.

“If I could, I would write a thank you letter to the person who invented air conditioning. The breeze of the lake was nice, but it was still hot and here it’s stifling. I love central air.”

Sam laughed. “Me too. I missed snuggling up tight to sleep.”
“I’m spoiled now.” Kurt scooted ever closer and intertwined his legs with Sam’s. He ran his fingers along Sam’s chest and down his ribs, causing Sam to squirm a bit.

“Tickly.”

“I know, but you like it when I do it just a little bit.”

“I do.”

“I have to sleep even though I have other things I’d rather do. 6:00 comes too early, but I’d rather go in early and get off early.” He leaned in and turned Sam’s head so they could kiss. “I love you.” He lay back down and got comfortable.

“I love you too.”

Kurt got to the end of the hallway and stepped into the bedroom, heading to the shower that he desperately needed after spending 8 hours repairing cars with the bay doors open. He could hear water running in the bathroom sink.

“Oh, my God, Sam. It’s gorgeous.”

Sam had painted a view of Lake Erie from the wooded area where they sat and watched the sunset. Sam stepped out of the bathroom into the bedroom. “You like it?”

“It’s perfect. Do I get to hang it up?”

Sam smiled, “Sure, if you want to.”

“I’m going to hang it over the bed. No, I’m going to hang it next to the dresser. I want to be able to look at it and if I put it over the bed, I won’t be able to see it unless I’m standing up or lying with my head at the bottom of the bed.”

“Well, it’s not quite finished.”

“That’s okay. I need to get a frame for it anyway before we can hang it. But it’s beautiful. I know you were afraid you wouldn’t be able to paint again. I know you still can’t write. How did you do it?”

“I used a couple of rubber bands to help keep the paintbrush in place without having to apply a lot of pressure with my thumb and I held the paintbrush differently than I used to. I used my desk easel on the table so I could put my elbow on the table and use my arm to control some of the movement instead of relying only on my wrist. And I just kind of fooled around for about an hour working on a position that worked and a way to hold the paintbrush and stuff. And I’ve gotten a lot more ambidextrous over the last couple of months. So, I used my left hand to rinse and wipe the brushes.”

“Well, it totally worked.” Kurt had tears streaming down his cheeks. “Let me shower and then I’m totally going to hug and kiss you. I’m so happy for you.”

Sam stepped closer and kissed him without touching him. “I could help you with that shower, if you’d like.”

“I’m sure you can…”
Chapter 19

When Kurt came in the room, he straddled Sam’s lap and ran his fingers through Sam’s hair. “You’re getting shaggy again. Personal style or in need of a haircut?”

“Haircut. By my favorite barber.”

“Mmm.”

“He gives great haircuts and kisses.”

“Is that a hint?”

“Maybe.”

Kurt ran his fingers down Sam’s ribs just lightly enough to tickle, which made Sam squirm a little. Kurt leaned down and kissed Sam gently. “I know you’re busy right now and I’ll let you get back to what you were doing, but I just wanted to kiss you.”

“Well, kissing breaks are my favorite kind of breaks. How’s the planning coming along?”

“Carole has chosen the cake and I sketched it out for the cake decorator at Sam’s Club. The invitations are ready. The real question is whether or not the people she sends them to can actually keep a secret.”

“Maybe you should give Rachel’s to Hiram and then wait to tell her the morning of the party.”

Kurt laughed. “That new therapist she had started seeing before school was out seemed like a big improvement over her last one. Maybe she’s learned the art of secret keeping over the summer, but it won’t matter for this. The party is guys only.”

“Oh. Do you even know what she’s been doing all summer?”

“No idea. I’m not ready to be the one to extend an olive branch until I see that she’s actually changed. We can be in the same group and be friendly without being friends.”

“I get that. Where’s Mercedes been?”

“That I don’t know either. She said she was going to put more effort into keeping in contact, but then she hasn’t. So, I don’t know what to think. I’ll reserve judgment I guess. Maybe she went out of town all summer. Who knows?”

“I can’t believe we only have 16 days until school starts again.”

“I know. The college visits we’ve gone on so far have been educational and helpful, but I don’t really feel like I’ve found the place I want to be yet. I’m hoping that the next couple feel more like a good fit. Or maybe I’m just expecting something that won’t happen.”

“I don’t know. I think some people get really hyped up about stuff, but I think everyone else just picks what works the best.”

“The one thing I’ve disliked about every school we’ve visited is the ‘freshman must live on campus’
“I know. I can’t afford to live on my own in any of the cities or towns that have colleges or universities. And if you can’t live off campus, I don’t know who I would room with. I don’t want to think about it.”

Kurt sighed and propped his head on Sam’s shoulder. “I know. I’ll get up and let you get back to what you were doing.” Kurt leaned down and kissed Sam chastely before climbing off his lap.

“What time is it?”

“5:13.”

“Okay. I’ll clean this up so I’m ready for a haircut in 10 minutes.”

“It looks great, by the way,” Kurt said as he went into the bathroom to get the tools out.

Sam smiled and started cleaning up.

“...”

“What do you think?”

Sam turned his head each direction. “I like it. I haven’t had it this short in a while. What do you think?”

“I think it looks good. How do you feel about it being your natural color now? I can a highlighting kit and put the blond back in if you want.”

“Nah, I’m good. When we moved here, I had the idea of lightning my hair to give me a surfer-dude vibe. But it’s fine this color. Maybe we can try the highlights some time, but I’m good for now.”

“Alright. Jump in the shower and I’ll clean this up. I’ll change and we’ll get going.”

Sam undressed and Kurt took his clothes and the cape downstairs to shake them out. He brought the broom and dustpan back upstairs and cleaned everything and put all of the tools back up and changed his clothes. While Sam was getting dressed, Kurt did his hair. They switched places again and Kurt took the broom and dustpan back down while Sam dried his hair. Kurt waited for him downstairs.

Sam saw that there was a letter for him on the front table as they were headed out the door. He picked it up and took it with them. He tossed it in his glove box when they got in his truck.

“So, now it will be five months tomorrow and I’m FINALLY taking you to Breadstix.”

Kurt laughed. “You know we can go anywhere. Breadstix doesn’t have the market on decent food in this town. It’s where all the high schoolers go, but we don’t have to go there.”

“It’s like this right of passage for Lima though. If you’re REALLY dating someone, you have to take them to Breadstix.”

“Well, I hope you’re not incredibly disappointed. High schoolers in Lima aren’t well-known for their high standards for sit-down meals. It’s mostly like you said, tradition. The booths don’t have any privacy and everyone can see who’s there. So, it’s a great place to go on a date and find gossip material – all for less than going to Olive Garden.”
“Doesn’t matter if we just order drinks and sit there for 30 minutes. I’m doing the Lima dating thing right.”

“You’re adorable. Let’s go give the town something to gossip about then.”

After they had finished eating, they were nearly to the exit when Kurt stopped.

“I almost forgot that napkin we were making that list on. Go on out. I’ll be right out there.”

Kurt made it back to their booth before anyone had cleared their table. He picked the napkin up, folded it in half and slipped it into his back pocket. He left the restaurant and walked down the sidewalk to get in the truck.

Sam opened the envelope while he was waiting. He read through it quickly and tossed it back into the glove box. When Kurt got in the truck, Sam pulled out of the parking lot and headed back home. He didn’t say anything for several minutes. He turned the CD on and they started singing along. After a couple of songs, he turned it back off.

“I opened that envelope while you were in there.”

“Oh?”

“It was the settlement check. $2500. I have to prove that I can’t get a job in order to get any more money. The parents, well three sets of them have filed a something contesting the requirement to pay me lost wages. Hiram kept the portion of the money that covered his legal fees and the medical bills up to this point. He’s dealing with that. It’s something complicated because I’m on Ohio Medicaid and they’ve been paying the bills, but I don’t have to deal with it. But I do have to figure out whether your dad can find something I can do at the shop or whether I need to go looking for another job.”

“Well, when we get home, you can go talk to my dad and I’ll go talk to Carole. I need to talk to her about Finn’s party again.”

“Carole?”

She answered from the laundry room. “In here, Kurt.”

“Can I talk to you?”

“Sure, honey.” She went to the living room and sat down on the sofa, and Kurt followed her.

“What’s up?”

“Well, we were working on Finn’s surprise party.”

“Yes.”

“I need to ask you something.”

“You seem really nervous.”

“Because it’s not something I want to talk about.” He took a deep breath and let it out. “Before you
moved in with my dad last fall, how often did Finn have guys over?”

“Pretty much all the time. Why?”

“How often did he have people over after you moved into this house?”

“Pretty much the same, why?”

“Was it the same people?”

“Honestly, I didn’t pay that much attention after we moved into this house because they hung out down in the family room.”

“I’m pretty sure it’s not the same group of people. There’s some overlap, but I think after you moved in here, he quit inviting the jocks over and he started hanging out at their places. I think he only had the guys from Glee over after you moved in with my dad.”

“You think?”

“I’m pretty sure. None of the jocks ever came over when I was here and I came home a lot of Fridays.”

“Oh, he had more people over on Saturdays than Fridays. And during the week too, when you were at Dalton.”

“I see.”

“What is it that you are trying to figure out?”

“You know that he didn’t invite me to his birthday party last year.”

“He did. He said you couldn’t come.”

“Not true. I heard about it Glee the next Monday. I pretended to be busy doing something else so no one would realize that I had heard what they were talking about.”

“I see.”

“I’m pretty sure that if you have the party here, half of the people on your list won’t come if they think I’ll be there.”

“Oh, Kurt.”

“It’s fine. Really. I’m completely used to it by now. The last birthday party I got invited to was back in third grade when the teachers still had the rule that if a student invited anyone, they had to invite everyone with the only exception of gender-divided parties. The girls could invite all of the girls and none of the boys and vice versa. And I didn’t even go then because I knew I wasn’t wanted.”

“So, what are you thinking?”

“I don’t honestly know. But if you don’t let them know somehow that I won’t be attending, you’ll get a lot of ‘no’s.’”

“This stuff makes me so mad. And I am sorry that you weren’t invited last year.”

“Doesn’t matter. I wouldn’t have come anyway. I would have made up some excuse about how I
was busy that day. Finn knew that, so he just saved the step of actually inviting me.” He took another deep breath and let it out slowly. “I think maybe the best thing would be to cancel the surprise aspect of it. If you tell Finn about the party when he comes home tomorrow, then he can do whatever he’s done in the past to let everyone know that I won’t be here when he gives out the invitations, physically or just by word of mouth. And I just need to come up with a good reason to be gone. So, I know we wrote the invitations to say his actual birthday, but maybe you should do it Friday evening. There’s no football game that week. They start the following week. He could have a sleepover for whoever wants to stay. Sam and I can just go somewhere else for the night. We didn’t actually print them out yet, so I can change the date.”

“Okay. I guess we can just do a family dinner on his actual birthday and swap it with Friday family dinner that week.”

Kurt pulled his phone out and looked at his calendar. “Actually that’s the weekend we were going to go to Kent State. We already have a hotel for that night. Sam and I are going to skip our Friday class at McKinley and Nick and Jeff don’t start school until that following Monday.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. You didn’t do anything. I’m fine. It upset me a lot when I was young, but now I’ve started making friends. And while the majority of people may still dislike me on principal, I am starting to meet people who are not in the majority. That’s one thing about being an adult. I can choose who I associate with and I can find like-minded people.”

“That’s true. So, I’ll need you to go change the invitation to say the 26th instead of the 24th.”

“I’ll do that and send it to you again.”

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.”

Sam went down into the family room. Burt was sitting on the sofa watching a fishing show. Sam sat down in the chair.

“Hey, Sam.”

“Can I talk to you?”

“Sure, Son. What’s going on?” Burt muted the TV.

“Well, I got the settlement check in the mail today.”

“That’s good, but you don’t sound pleased.”

“The money is fine, but three of the families are filing something to make me prove that I can’t get any kind of job. They don’t want to keep paying the lost wages portion of the settlement.”

“I see.”

“So, I need to know if there is something I can legitimately do at the shop for 15 hours a week once school starts because if there isn’t I need to get out and start searching for another job because I can’t pay my bills without an income. And as soon as I go to the bank Monday, I’ll pay you what I owe
you for the last two months since you paid my phone and insurance.”

“That’s fine, Sam. I knew you’d get the money eventually. But as far as the shop, what can you do?”

“Run the cash register. Move the cars in and out of the bays. I can’t think of much else.”

“What will you try to get a job doing?”

“Cashier at a grocery store? Or WalMart? I can’t lift stuff. I have barely any grip strength. I can’t go back to the gas station because I had to lift boxes and stock the shelves there. I had to stack the drink crates and load the cartons and stuff in the walk in fridge. I can’t do that anymore. I can’t sweep or mop or clean things. And I still can’t write legibly, not that my handwriting was great before, but it’s completely illegible now.”

Burt sat there thinking.

“I can’t tutor people. I tried working fast food back in Tennessee and I quit before I was fired. I’m not fast enough on the registers because it takes me too long to find the right buttons. I used to work manual labor in Tennessee in the summer, working on farms. I just don’t know. I won’t be released to try anything strenuous for months as far as I know. My next orthopedist appointment is the 22nd.”

“I’ll be honest with you. I can’t really justify someone to just run the cash register.”

“I figured not. It’s not like WalMart where there is a constant stream of customers. I was doing other stuff besides that when I was at the shop, even though I barely worked there before I got hurt. I know you already hired someone to replace me.”

“I did.”

“I’ll let you get back to your show.” Sam stood up. “I’m going to head upstairs and watch something up there.”

Burt unmated the TV and turned his attention back to his show.

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Sam went upstairs and found Kurt sitting at the table working on the invitation for Finn’s birthday party.

“So what was the verdict?” He started massaging Kurt’s neck gently.

“The party is no longer a surprise party. It’s going to be on Friday instead of Wednesday and you are I will be in Kent at the time. I just need to send this to Carole, then I can turn this off. That feels good.”

“I’ll let you finish that. How about a shower when you’re done. I want to get in bed.”

“Yeah, sure. I just needed to get this done.” He rolled his neck around slowly while Sam continued to rub his neck with his left hand.

Sam sniffled. Kurt turned and looked up.

“Sweetie, what’s wrong?”

“I’m just going to go shower while you finish that up. You can get in when you’re done.” He grabbed some pajama pants and headed into the bathroom.
It took Kurt about two minutes to send the amended invitation. He shut the computer before followed Sam. He grabbed his own pajama pants, went into the bathroom, and stripped down. “Sam, I’m getting in.” He gave him a few seconds to move out of the way, if need be. He stepped in, closed the door, and reached out and ran his hand down Sam’s back. “What upset you?” Kurt reached for Sam’s shampoo and started to wash his hair. Once it was completely lathered, Kurt took the sprayer and rinsed it. He put the sprayer back up and grabbed Sam’s washcloth and washed him gently, running his left hand through the sudsy sections and caressing him gently. Once he finished, he rinsed him completely and put the sprayer back. He stepped closer and ran his fingers down Sam’s cheek and kissed him gently. “It’s okay if you don’t want to talk right now. Do you want to get out and dry off or wash me?”

Sam traded places with Kurt and began by washing his hair. He went through the entire process silently. Once Kurt was rinsed, Sam kissed him just like Kurt had. He turned and stepped out of the shower. He dried off, put his pajama pants on, and brushed his teeth. He left the bathroom once he had finished.

Kurt dried, dressed, and brushed his teeth as well. He grabbed all of their clothes and took them to the laundry basket. He turned the lights off and turned some music on as he went back to his vanity. He did a quick layer of moisturizer, turned the vanity lights off, and got into bed with Sam. He moved his arm, giving Sam to scoot over and lay his head on Kurt’s shoulder, which he did. Kurt wrapped his arm around Sam’s shoulders and squeezed gently. He kissed him on the top of the head and just lay there in silence, gently caressing Sam’s shoulder every once in a while.

After about 10 minutes, Sam said, “I just feel useless. In all of the years of being an absolutely terrible student, I’ve felt stupid plenty of times, but I never felt useless. But I do now.”

Kurt kissed the top of his head again, but just lay there and gave Sam time to continue if he was going to.

“I don’t see how I can stay enrolled in the ceramics course this fall. I think I need to go over to the campus and see if the instructor is available for a consultation. I need to know if anyone with this type of injury has been able to return to doing clay work. I’ve lost my grip strength and mobility. My fingers are still somewhat swollen. And my ability to flex is very slow.”

“I think going to see the instructor is a great idea. If they don’t think you can do it, you can go in and select something else instead. I’m not sure what other art classes are being offered, but we can look.”

“I have to come to terms with the fact that I need to make the settlement check I got today last for as long as possible because your dad doesn’t have a position for me anymore and my only other option is to try to get on someplace like a grocery store as a cashier. I can’t lift anything and cashier is the only type of job I can do now. I’m not a good typist or anything that could get me a desk job. Plus, I’m so bad at reading stuff, I could never file things the right way. I can’t play any sports. I just feel useless. I want to be your partner, not someone that needs taken care of. I know it sounds whiny and I’m aware that I’m throwing myself a pity party. But it’s just how I feel right now.”

“And you’re allowed to feel however you feel. I just want you to know that how I feel about you hasn’t changed. Your hand still being injured and not being back to 100% isn’t going to change that I love you.” Kurt contemplated getting up and giving Sam what he had ordered, but he decided that they were both too tired. He ran his hand along Sam’s upper arm. “Is this how you want to sleep?”

“No. I want to be the little spoon and sleep with my wrist and hand on a pillow. That’s still the most comfortable position.”

“Sit up for a minute, then.”
Kurt got up and grabbed a throw pillow and laid it on the bed and waited for Sam to scoot over and get comfortable. He leaned down and kissed him on the forehead before he went around to the other side of the bed and scooted up behind Sam and got comfortable. He kissed the back of his neck and relaxed. He continued to caress Sam’s upper arm and kiss the back of his neck for a few minutes before he rested his hand on Sam’s hip to go to sleep.

Sam woke up to Kurt lightly licking his ear and kissing down his neck.

“Feels awesome,” he said sleepily. “Closer.”

“Sweetie, you’re on your side facing the edge of the bed, I can’t get closer unless you scoot to the middle a little bit.”

“M’kay.”

Kurt moved back a bit and gave Sam room to scoot back and lie on his back. “What do you want me to do?”

“Kiss me more.”

“On your neck?”

“Mmm hmm. Ev’rywhere.”

Kurt giggled. “I’ll see what I can do.” By the time Kurt got to Sam’s ribs, he was wide awake and laughing.

“That tickles.”

“You asked me to kiss you everywhere. Your ribs are definitely part of everywhere.”

Between laughing, he said, “Put your tongue back in and kiss. I never said to lick me everywhere.”

“Oh, but I know how much you like to be licked.” Kurt moved down the bed and reached for Sam’s waistband.

“Shall I lick here instead?”

“Mmm hmm. Definitely, yes.”

Kurt came upstairs carrying a load of laundry. “Are you ready yet?”

“Nope.” Sam said as he came out of the closet in just a button-up shirt. “The shorts I want to wear are in the laundry you just brought up.” He walked over to the bed and looked through the basket and found his khaki shorts and pulled them out of the stack carefully. He laid them on the bed and grabbed the rest of his stack of shorts and put them on the shelf in the closet.

Kurt put his in as well. He managed a grope or two on the way past Sam in and out of the closet, causing Sam to laugh. Kurt put the rest of their clothes in the dresser while Sam got dressed the rest of the way. He put the empty basket back in the closet when he finished. “Done! Now sit up on the bed, I have something for you. Close your eyes.” Kurt pulled an envelope out of his sock drawer and put it in Sam’s outstretched hands. “Open them.”
Sam opened the package and emptied the contents into his hand. He looked at the three yellow and black plastic objects, but didn’t seem to be able to place them. “What are they?”

“They’re called bumblebee thumb picks. Watch.” Kurt picked one up and slid it over Sam’s thumb. Now you can play your guitar without having to hold a pick between your index finger and thumb.” He got Sam’s guitar out of its case and brought it to him. “Let’s see if they work.”

“It’s an interesting idea.” Sam used it to tune his guitar.

“It’s an older guy with some arthritis issues, I think it said, created it. It’s adjustable so you can get the pick in the position that you like.”

Sam started to play “Lucky”. After playing for a minute or so, he took the thumb pick off, adjusted it a little bit and put it back on. He started “Lucky” again, only this time, he started to sing and Kurt joined him. They made it through the whole song.

“It’s unusual, but I think it will work. C’mere.”

Kurt leaned forward and ended up on all fours to balance himself and kissed Sam.

“Thank you. I was too down to look into seeing if anyone had designed something like this. I wonder if the physical therapist knows of things like this that might exist for painters or artists. I need something to help me keep hold of the paintbrush or whatever I’m using.”

“It can’t hurt to ask. Play me something else.”

“I’m so out of practice.”

“I know. It’s okay. You can play ‘Low Places’ again or whatever the name of the song actually is. Anything that you know really well, so you can learn to use the new pick without having to focus too much on anything else. We only have about 15 minutes before we’re leaving anyway. Just play anything you want to. I’m going to run down and get our hanging clothes. Kurt came back up and Sam was playing ‘Friends in Low Places’. He smiled when he heard it as he came in the room. He put everything away and shut the closet door.

“I think I can make it work. It’s a little different strumming without using the pressure from my index finger on the up stroke, but I’ll work on it. Thank you.” Sam put the new picks in the pocket of his guitar case, put his guitar in, and shut the case.

Kurt grabbed it and put it back against the wall in the corner. “Ready?”

“Just need my shoes. Can you grab the painting? You have the iPod, right?”

Kurt walked over and grabbed them both. “I’ve got them. Let’s go.”

Carole drove on the way to Aunt Eunice’s, citing that both Burt and Kurt would have to drive on the way home. Most of the conversation centered around either college research and visits or Burt and Carole’s upcoming trip to Hawaii.

Once they were in Zanesville, they drove to the sandwich shop that Sam and Kurt had gone to on their first trip. Carole had ordered the day before and everything was ready to pick up when they got there. Kurt went in with her and helped her carry everything out to the Navigator. He had put some crates in the back to help keep everything from sliding around or falling over before they left, so they
slipped the sacks in one of the crates and headed to the bakery.

Kurt and Carole went inside and waited their turn. Kurt was surprised when they weren’t picking up a cake. He found out that Aunt Eunice had a weak spot for donuts and they picked up a half-dozen each of 8 different kinds of donut holes.

They pulled into the driveway about 11:45. Finn came out to greet them and he helped carry the food in. They took it in through the back door. Finn went back into the living room and started carrying his stuff out to the Navigator while Kurt and Sam set everything up. Carole kept Aunt Eunice occupied and out of the kitchen since the birthday lunch was a surprise.

Carole had told them where to find the tablecloths on the drive over. Sam pulled one out and they put it on the table. They set all of the sandwiches up on plates and put the sides in real bowls instead of the containers they were in. They transferred the donuts to 8 bowls and placed them in a row along the counter in two rows and put the gifts next to them. Once they had everything set up, Kurt text Carole and Finn. Finn came back in the back door and stood with Kurt and Sam.

As soon as Aunt Eunice stepped into the kitchen, the three teens launched into a joyful version of “Happy Birthday” that Burt and Carole joined in quickly.

“You all are too much,” she said. “Thank you, but you didn’t need to go to all this trouble.”

“It wasn’t any trouble. I promise,” Carole said. “I didn’t lift a finger to make any of the food.”

Aunt Eunice laughed. “It looks like you hit the sandwich shop in town. I love that place. And what’s that over there on the counter? Donuts? Are those all different kinds?”

“They are,” Carole said.

“You are my favorite niece, you know?”

Carole laughed. “Of course. Let’s eat.”

They all sat down and started passing the sides around the table.

“The time we went we just tried the sweet and sour slaw, but the regular slaw is good too,” Kurt said.

“I had to make sure to never drive past that place after I went there one day with one of the other guys that worked at the camp. Otherwise, I’d have never saved up the money I needed.”

Burt laughed. “I bet. This is really good.”

Aunt Eunice asked about their upcoming trip and the guys’ plans for the fall while they ate. Once they were finished, Kurt and Finn cleared the table and Sam moved the donut holes to the table and put them in a row down the middle, leaving a gap in front of Aunt Eunice. Kurt grabbed the gifts and put them on the table in front of her.

“You did not need to get me any gifts.” But the smile on her face gave away how excited she actually was. She opened the largest one first. “Oh, now this is beautiful. Sam, honey, I love it. I know just where I’m going to hang it. You can help me in a little bit.”

He smiled, “Sure. I’m glad you like it.”

She opened the larger box next. “I bet I know who this is from. Finn. You didn’t have to replace it,
but this is really lovely. It’s the perfect colors for the living room. I’ll get rid of that plastic bowl. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, Aunt Eunice. I’m glad you like it.”

“It’s prettier than the other one I had anyway. I had bought it at a pottery show back in the 70s. But I like this one better.”

Sam smiled, but didn’t say anything. Finn had paid for it fair and square so it was his to gift and not for Sam to say anything about having made it.

Next she reached for the other box.

Kurt spoke up. “Those two go together. The small one is from me.”

“And what’s in the box is from us,” Carole said.

She opened the smaller one first. She looked at it and didn’t really know what to say. “I’m just going to be honest and tell you that I have no idea what this is.”

Kurt said, “It’s an iPod. It stores music. All of your music is on there. Finn took each of your CDs and transferred them to flash drive, which is a portable memory device. I got it from him when we came for the Fourth of July. I took it home and I put all of your music on this. I’ll show you how to use it.”

“All of my CDs fit in this little thing?”

“Oh, yeah,” Sam laughed. “It could hold even more.”

“Technology these days. Let me open this box.” She opened it and found an iPod dock. “Well, you said they go together and from the looks of the picture on the box. I stick this iPod into these speakers.” She pulled the speakers out and put the iPod in the dock. She also pulled the earbuds out, but left them sit on the table like they were just cords.

“Exactly. You can put this in your bedroom and listen to the music. You can also just plug the earbuds into it and listen to the music that way.” He picked them up and showed her that they were like headphones without the headband part.

Aunt Eunice said, “It’s like a Walkman with no cassettes needed.”

“Exactly,” Kurt said. “But it’s rechargeable. So, it doesn’t need any batteries. When you dock it in the speakers, it recharges.”

“Well, isn’t that spiffy. I like it. And I’ll be the only 71 year old, well 72 next week, looking hip and modern with my iPod and ear whats?”

“Earbuds,” Kurt offered.

“With my iPod and earbuds.”

“It’s super easy to use. I’ll show you.” Kurt demonstrated how to use it and she caught on quickly.

“Looks easy enough. Finn, take those speakers in my room and plug them up behind my bedside table, so I don’t have to get down on my hands and knees to do it myself later.”

“Yes, Aunt Eunice. Which side?”
“The right. That’s where the outlet is.”

“Got it.” Finn took the speaker and took it to her bedroom.

“So, I just stick these in my ears and plug them in like headphones.” She put them in and turned the iPod on and picked a CD to listen to.” After a couple of minutes, she turned it off. “This is great. Now, I can listen to my music outside if I want to or while I wait at the doctor’s office. How long does it stay charged?”

“10 hours if it’s fully charged.”

“I love it. Thanks for everything. Let’s eat these donuts.”

Once they had finished, Finn packed up the leftover donuts in a ziplock bag. Kurt and Sam loaded the dishwasher and turned it on. Carole tossed the tablecloth in the laundry. Burt ended up being the one to help Aunt Eunice hang the painting from Sam, since he couldn’t use any tools still.

“It’s perfect. I can see it from my reading chair. You did a fantastic job of making the painting feel like I did when I used to go there. I can’t believe you did all that from that tiny photo on the shelf. I loved riding in the rodeos there as a teen and into my 20’s. It was so much fun.”

“I’m glad you like it.”

They sat around and talked for a while, mostly listening to Aunt Eunice tell stories of her younger years competing in horse-riding events.

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They were all standing outside in the front yard, hugging Aunt Eunice in turn.

“I’ve enjoyed having you here, Finn. I’m going to miss you. Come see me.”

“I will. I had fun here too. Thanks for helping me get the job. I have enough money to pay for the damage I caused now, and a little bit left over.”

“Well, learning to be a man of your word is important, even when it’s hard.”

“I know. I’ve also done a lot of thinking while I’ve been here and I’m going to do my best to think through my actions instead of just doing whatever comes to mind first.”

“Always a good idea,” she said. She pulled him into a tight hug. “You’ll figure it out. You’ll get there.”

Finn walked toward the Navigator and got in the back seat. Sam and Kurt were next to say their goodbyes. Once they were in, Kurt pulled of the driveway, heading back to Lima.

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Two and a half hours later, they pulled into the shop lot.

Burt stopped Finn as soon as he got out of the backseat and handed him a box. “Go ahead and pull anything out of your truck and put it in this box and move it to the back of the Navigator. Come inside the shop when you finish. It’s too hot to stand around out here. It shouldn’t take me too long to do what I need to do. I just need to pick something up. Kurt’s already letting everyone else in to wait in the air conditioning.”
“Okay. I’ll be right in. There’s not much in here.”

“Don’t forget whatever’s in the glove box.”

“Right. Got it.”

Five minutes later, Finn walked into the shop through the customer service door. He didn’t see anyone, so he turned to walk into the work bay area. When he opened the door, Burt and Carole were standing to the left and Kurt and Sam were standing to the right, and in between them was a beautiful green truck.

“Surprise. Happy early birthday!” Carole said.

“No way. No way! This truck is for me?”

“Yes, Finn. It’s yours,” she said.

He moved closer and put his hands on the hood and ran them across it gently. “She’s beautiful. I can’t believe this is mine.”

“Well, believe it, Son. She’s all yours.” Burt handed him a key.

He pulled his keychain out to put it on. He pulled off the key to his old truck and handed it to Burt. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, but don’t forget to thank Kurt. He pretty much rebuilt the entire engine over the last several months.”

Finn turned to Kurt. “Thanks, man. She’s amazing. Can I go for a drive?”

“Yes, you can go for a drive. Come home by 7:30 for dinner, please.”

“Sure thing, Mom. I’ll be home by 7:30.” He walked around to the driver’s seat and got in.

Kurt moved over to the bay door and opened it to let Finn drive it out of the garage.

After dinner, Carole kept Finn back to talk to him. Everyone else left the kitchen after the dishes had been done. Fifteen minutes later, there was knock on their open door.

“Hey, Kurt?”

Kurt looked up from the book he was reading. “Yeah?”

“Will you come for a ride with me?”

“Sure.” He moved his bookmark and put his book in the alcove next to the bed. He grabbed his shoes and followed Finn downstairs. He sat at the bottom of the stairs and put them on. “Ready.”

They got into Finn’s new truck and he pulled out of the driveway. “I’m in the mood for ice cream. Do you want any?”

“Not really, but I’m fine with you getting some.”

“Great.” Finn headed to Dairy Queen and got in the drive-thru line when they got there. “Are you
“Sure you don’t want one?”

“Fine. I’ll have a small vanilla cone.”

Finn placed their order and they waited in line to get up to the window.

“Why did you want me to come out with you?”

“Because I wanted to talk to you, but it’s hard. I spent a lot of time talking to Aunt Eunice. More than I ever have since she was the only one there most of the time. And she doesn’t have cable or internet, so there’s not a lot to do.”

“Okay.”

They made it up to the window and Finn paid. He handed Kurt his cone and took his Mississippi Mud Blizzard and pulled into a parking spot under a tree. He took a few bites before he started to talk.

“After we came back from seeing you in the musical, we talked a lot on the drive back and the rest of that weekend. She told me that I can tell you what she told me, so don’t worry that I’m telling someone’s secrets.”

“That’s good. Telling other people’s secrets isn’t usually a good idea.”

“So, anyway, the whole conversation started because I said something about you not seeming girly at all in the play.”

“Alright…”

“And Aunt Eunice asked why I would say such a thing. So, it turned into this really long conversation like I said. Basically, she really got onto me for the way I talk about you even when I felt like I was being nice. I’m not sure that makes any sense, but just listen, okay?”

“Okay.”

“She talked about how what I had done at the wedding was emasculating. And first she explained what that word mean, and then she explained the whole thing about how I had used a song written for a girl and sang it to you without changing the pronouns and how it wasn’t an appropriate song for a brotherly type of love and friendship. And anyway, I didn’t mean anything bad by it and she said she understood that, but that I didn’t think through my choice. She said I was just making myself the center of attention again. That I was acting like treating you like you had the right to be who you were was a big deal and that it wasn’t right. That you had planned the whole wedding and then I made a big deal about how I was accepting of you.”

“It was uncomfortable, but I knew you didn’t mean it in a bad way.”

“This is what has to stop. When I said that I need to learn to think through my actions, I need to learn how to do that just that. I absolutely thought it was a really nice thing to do, but I also realize now how it seemed after she pointed all that stuff out. I think I need to learn how to figure out whether something is a good choice. I don’t know how to see something from someone’s else’s side.”

“Well, that’s a big problem and it explains a lot. Go on.”

“So, the conversation lasted forever and we talked about a million things it seems. But what she told me is that she’s a lesbian. She’s never dated a girl and she did date a boy when she was in high
school, but she explained how dating then was different than it is now. She said that back in the 1950’s when she was a teenager, no one talked about being gay. She said she told her parents right after graduation, so that if they were going to kick her out, she would be old enough to move out and live on her own. But they didn’t disown her, and they actually supported her horse-riding activities and allowed her to be a tomboy. She went to college, which I guess was really unusual and she became a secretary and worked for some company forever before she retired. She’s only ever told a few people, not even my mom. She said the only reason she told me was because I’m so mixed up and that I keep hurting you and she couldn’t bear to not speak up. She says she’s not ashamed, but that she’s still not going to tell everyone because it’s none of their business.”

“Okay.”

Finn sat and ate more of his Blizzard. Kurt had already finished his cone.

“So, I told her all sorts of stuff and she basically told me what a screw up I’ve been, but that she loves me and knows that I can do better. It was a combination between your ‘you matter’ and ‘your status will be useless in a year’ talks. After we got back, she wrote a lot of the things I told her on the top of separate sheets of paper and then she went through why what I did was wrong or how what I did hurt someone. I really didn’t know. Seeing her write things down and explain how the other person felt was really weird. Like how does she know how someone else feels about something?”

“From watching and observing and listening to people – even from people in movies and books. We all amass a giant pool of social and emotional knowledge from observing.”

Finn ate some more. “That makes sense actually. You told me that I’m oblivious to what’s going on around me a lot of the time. If I’m zoned out and not paying attention to what’s going on around me, then I wouldn’t be seeing and listening and learning this stuff.”

“That’s true. I think that you need to tell this part to your mom. Maybe there is some kind of therapist that can help with this. Not like a psychiatrist, but you know about physical therapists – they help with injuries. Speech therapists help kids who have trouble speaking. Maybe there’s some kind of specialist that helps people notice things and process the information better.”

“Maybe you can go with me to tell her.”

“Alright.”

“So, anyway, I realized why you’re always so aggravated with me. And why Rachel and Quinn and Puck and everyone else was too. I know why I get called numbskull and get told to pay attention about a billion times a week, it seems. I didn’t get the algebra stuff at all until Erek started using stuff to show me what he was trying to explain, like sticks of gum and pieces of candy. He made all those a, b, and c formulas actually MEAN something. After I got that, doing the problems got a lot easier.”

“I’m glad he helped you.”

“Yeah. So, anyway, I brought you out because I learned a whole lot about myself that I don’t really like since I saw you in July. And also because Mom said that you and Sam aren’t going to come to my birthday party.”

“We’re not. We’re going to be in Kent, staying overnight to spend two days looking at the university.”

“Yeah, she told me. But she also told me that you suggested that she move the party to Friday so that you’d have a reason to not be home and I could tell all my friends that you won’t be there. She told
me that you told her that I hadn’t invited you last year.”

“I did. I didn’t do it to tattle on you. I’m not mad. It’s just how things are. If you had invited me, I would have come up with something to do that night so I’d be busy.”

“I know. That’s why I didn’t bother. You never came to any of the guys-only stuff. I never knew why or bothered to ask, now that I think about it. But I knew you wouldn’t come. But when she brought it up, I realized that this won’t be the only time it’s a problem. Sam worked late and he was never home on the weekends. I still invited those guys over until pretty much the end of the semester. Then I left to go to Zanesville. But school is starting again and you and Sam will be home. I don’t know what to do. I can’t just ask you to leave your own house.”

“Well, our bedroom door locks. You could just warn us, so we know when to avoid the family room. We don’t go down there that often anyway. Plus, between working and taking four college classes, I doubt we’ll be doing much else.”

“The thing is that after talking to Aunt Eunice, I don’t really want to be friends with those guys anymore.”

“Really. That’s the most surprising thing you’ve said so far.”

“But I don’t know how to not be friends with them without ending up getting bullied.”

“Well, remember, the school has the new No Bullying policy. Slushie throwing, locker slams – all of that won’t be allowed anymore.”

“I remember that. I just know that it’s more than that. I won’t get invited to anything. It will be really boring.”

Kurt rolled his eyes. “You have to keep working. You have to keep doing the things you learned to do for yourself this summer, like your laundry and cooking. You have to actually DO your schoolwork. Your best hope at getting into a college at this point is going to be to do decently on the SAT, pass any OGTs you haven’t passed yet this during the retest time this fall, and get good grades this year. You probably don’t have the academic record you need to get into a big school like Ohio State, but you could get into one of the community colleges around here and do your first year there. You’re not going to have time to horse around after school every day if you’re working. Or if you get a job on the weekends, you’ll have to keep up with your schoolwork during the week.”

“Right. But that still leaves me with not knowing what to do about the football and basketball guys.”

“I don’t know. How about tell them that the family room is only yours to use two days a week now? That way, you can limit the number of times you have people over. I think you need to talk to someone else about this. I’m not the right person.”

“Okay. I’ll be right back.” He got out and tossed his cup and spoon in the trash.

“I’m not changing our plans for the Kent trip. I already booked a hotel a couple of weeks ago. We already have the plans all worked out. So, you can work on this issue of who to invite or not invite with your mom. Or talk to my Dad. He was a jerk-ish football player from what he says. He quit. Find out how.”

“That’s a good idea.”

“And your mom and my Dad are going to be gone to Hawaii and no one can come over then. So, if you are having guys over next week, you need to let me know in advance so I can make my own
decision about what to do. But you can’t have them over every day. You all need to take turns whose house you go to.”

“Yeah. I know, but our house is bigger than everyone’s and they all like to come to ours.”

“Be that as it may, I’m not going to make arrangements to not be home every evening of the week during football camp. Take turns.”

“Got it. Anyway, even though I’m doing a horrible job of explaining myself and everything, I really did learn a lot and I’m really sorry about how my being oblivious hurt you. After I called that stuff in your room reded that word, I remember you saying that you thought I was different and I said that I was, but I wasn’t yet. I thought I was because I wasn’t awful to you. But that’s not enough. Aunt Eunice told me that being passive while others are being actively hurtful makes it look like I agree with what they’re doing. Even last fall, I was still prejudiced. I’m getting better. Keep telling me, like I asked you to.”

“Okay.”

“Do you want to get something for Sam before we go?”

“Not from here. It would melt and he doesn’t usually eat stuff like this. You can go to the grocery store or the gas station and get him one of those Odwallas, if you want to get him something.”

“See. Just then. I did it again. I never thought about Sam not wanting ice cream. I thought I was being nice offering to get him something since he’s not with us, but I messed up because I don’t pay attention to what he actually likes. What’s a Wodalla?”

“Odwalla. It’s a brand of smoothie.”

“Oh. We can stop at the gas station and you can pick it out and I’ll pay for it.”

“Sure.”

Finn smiled. “I’m going to try. I’ll tell Mom I want help.”

Kurt nodded. “That’s a good plan. Let’s get going.”

Finn smiled. “I’m going to try. I’ll tell Mom I want help.”

Kurt nodded. “That’s a good plan. Let’s get going.”

Kurt and Sam walked through the dining room and out into the backyard. Sam put the gift bags on a chair and Kurt put their bag next to it. They took their t-shirts off, laid them on the back of the chair, and headed toward the pool. They both sat down on the edge and didn’t get right in.

“Welcome, you two. Nick and Jeff are out back. It’s good to see you both,” Mrs. Duval said.

“Thanks. And thanks for inviting us.”

“We’re glad to have you.”

Kurt and Sam walked through the dining room and out into the backyard. Sam put the gift bags on a chair and Kurt put their bag next to it. They took their t-shirts off, laid them on the back of the chair, and headed toward the pool. They both sat down on the edge and didn’t get right in.

“Come on. The water’s not cold or anything,” Jeff said.

“I can tell. I just want to remind both of you not to grab me. I took the brace off and I need to be careful. I don’t want to set myself back by reinjuring my hand.”

“We know. No games of chicken or anything. We have a beach ball and a net we can put across the pool.”
“That sounds like fun,” Kurt said.

“We’ll put it up in a little bit,” Jeff said.

“Are we set for later this week and next week?” Nick asked. “I hadn’t really given Kent State any thought until it was on that list Emily showed you and then we looked up what they offer. It might be a good fit.”

“Yeah, we’re looking forward to it,” Sam said. “Not being from Ohio, I had never even heard of it, but it does look interesting.”

“And next weekend is the University of Cincinnati,” Nick said.

Kurt said, “Yeah. We have a hotel room booked for that one already too and it has a pool. We’ll pick Sam up Friday morning, go to the university, and then go sightseeing on Saturday before we pick my parents up at the airport. I’ve already started making a list of possible places to visit. I’ll email it to you when we get back home and you two and look through it too.”

Jeff said, “Sounds good. I saw you bring in gift bags. You didn’t need to get us gifts.”

“I know,” Kurt said. “We wanted to.”

An hour later, everyone was seated around a large patio table eating.

“This is really good, Mrs. Sterling,” Kurt said, referring to the cole slaw. “I’d love the recipe, if you’re willing to share it.”

“Sure. It’s my grandma’s recipe. It has a special ingredient in it that I’ve never seen anyone else use.”

“Well, I really like it. When we were Zanesville earlier this summer, we went to this sandwich shop that had this sweet and sour slaw. That was really good too. I should see if I can find a recipe for that.”

“I’ve never heard of such a thing,” Mrs. Duval said.

“I hadn’t either, but it was really good,” Sam said.

They continued eating and talking, mostly about the upcoming school year and their college visits. Once everyone had finished, the teens helped clear everything and the adults went inside for a while because it was so hot out.

“So, do you want to open them now or wait?” Sam asked.

Jeff hopped up and grabbed both bags and didn’t wait for Nick to answer.

Nick laughed. “I guess now’s good.” He pulled the tissue out of the top and pulled the item out and unfolded it. It was a deep forest green hoodie. “Oh, wow. That’s really cool. A Green Arrow hoodie. Did you guys make this?”

“We did,” Kurt answered.

“Even more cool.”

“Well, you told us that you didn’t have many winter clothes and I know how much you like Green
Arrow, so it seemed like a good idea.”

Jeff was already pulling a navy blue hoodie. “Mine’s awesome and better than yours,” he teased.

Nick said, “That’s a matter of opinion. Just because you like Superman doesn’t make yours better than mine.”

“Sure it does,” Jeff said. “I love it. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome,” Kurt said. “I’m glad you both like them.”

“They’ll be perfect for Comic Con,” Jeff said.

“You’re going to Comic Con?” Sam asked.

“Duh,” Jeff answered. “I LOVE Comic Con.”

“How did I not know this?” Sam asked. “We’ve spent weeks together.”

“I guess I never mentioned that we had tickets. It’s not like you said that you did. You still didn’t actually say that you do.”

Kurt said, “We do.”

Nick picked up Jeff’s hoodie and he put both of them over the back of two chairs out of the sun. “Ready to get back in the pool? It’s too hot to just sit out here.”

“Sure,” Sam said.

An hour later, the Mr. Duval opened the patio door and stepped out. “Come on in guys. We’re going to get the cakes out.”

Sam climbed out of the pool and grabbed his towel to dry off. “Cakes? As is more than one?”

“Of course, there’s more than one,” Jeff responded. “Nick wanted a chocolate ice cream cake with chocolate praline ice cream and I wanted Black Forest cake with cherries in the middle and cherry ice cream.”

Kurt said, “I see. This sounds like a premeditated plot to get twice as much cake.”

Jeff said, “Of course it is. We agreed to never agree on the cake YEARS ago. That way we get twice as much cake. Otherwise, it’s like getting cheated out of cake. Just because we don’t mind celebrating together doesn’t mean we should get less cake out of the deal.”

Kurt laughed. “Of course not.”

They all headed straight upstairs so they didn’t drip on the wood floor in the dining room. Nick and Jeff grabbed their hoodies on the way in. Kurt grabbed their bag.

“You two can use the hallway bathroom. It’s right there.” Nick pointed. He and Jeff continued to Nick’s bedroom.

When the four of them came back out, they were all wearing shorts and the super hero hoodies.
“Yours are awesome too,” Jeff said when he saw Kurt and Sam’s hoodies.

“Thanks,” Sam said.

“Let’s go eat cake.” Jeff bounded down the stairs first, with Nick following behind him.

“Those are cool,” Mrs. Duval said.

Jeff said, “They are Kurt and Sam originals. One day when one of them is famous, we’ll sell them off for a million dollars.”

Kurt rolled his eyes and laughed. “I get a cut if I’m only famous, but not rich.”

“Sure, sure,” Jeff said. “Whatever you say.”

“Do they need to be washed a special way?” Mrs. Sterling asked.

Kurt answered, “Just turn them inside out and wash them in cold or not too warm water and hang them to dry.”

She nodded. “I’m assuming you made the ones the two of you are wearing as well.”

“We did.”

Mrs. Duval looked at Kurt’s deep brown hoodie with Hulkling and then back at Sam’s plum hoodie with Wiccan on it. “I don’t recognize the two you are wearing, even after looking more closely. Kurt’s looks sort of like the Hulk, but not really. The hulk isn’t blond.”

Kurt said, “Mine is Hulkling. And Sam’s is Wiccan. They’re part of the Young Avengers. They’re a couple.”

Mr. Duval said, “I’ve obviously fallen behind the times. I didn’t know there were any gay super heroes.”

“Me neither,” Mr. Sterling said.

“Neither did I until Sam told me. I started reading comic books after that.”

Mr. Duval laughed.

Mr. Sterling said, “You did a really nice job on all of them. They have that vintage look. I like them. Jeff said that Sam was an artist. I don’t recall him saying anything about Kurt.”

“Thanks,” Sam said. “It was Kurt’s idea originally. And we had fun doing ours, so we thought it would be fun to make them for Nick and Jeff. Kurt mostly draws clothes and designs really cool things, but he spread his wings with this project and branched out to drawing and painting comic book characters.”

Jeff started being silly. “Cake, cake, cake, cake.”

“Fine, fine, Jeff. We get it. It’s time to sing and eat cake.”

After they sang, Mrs. Sterling started slicing up the cakes and putting pieces on paper plates. Mrs. Duval scooped out ice cream and the four teens sat down at the dining room table. The adults came in a few minutes later.
“That was definitely an interesting double-feature,” Kurt said, as Sam drove back to Lima.

“Rango was funny.”

“I thought so too, but Limitless was intense. I think Dad and Finn would like it, maybe even Carole. We could rent it for Finn’s birthday.”

“That’s true.”

“Well, we could rent Limitless, Rango, and The Green Lantern. And he can pick.”

“That works. The Green Lantern has been out for a while, so it shouldn’t be too hard to find in a Red Box.”

“Talking about Finn’s birthday party reminds me that I don’t think I ever told you, but when I talked to Carole last Friday when we got back from Breadstix, I brought up the topic of who Finn invites over and I was mistaken about him not inviting the jocks over anymore. He was just doing it during the weekdays when I was at Dalton and then on Saturday evenings after I had gone back. He had the Glee guys over a couple of times on Fridays. So, that’s an issue that’s going to need to be dealt with. I’m not trying to limit Finn’s friend base or tell him who he can and can’t be friends with, but I’m not interested in running into people who dislike me in my own house. But then when he took me out for ice cream, he said a bunch of convoluted stuff about not really wanting to be friends with them anymore either. But I haven’t heard that they weren’t invited to the party, so I don’t know where that issue stands. I told him we wouldn’t be here that night no matter who he invited. I also told him no one can come over while our parents are gone.”

“New topic that has nothing to do with Finn or his birthday. When we get home, we need to start looking at all those different charts and lists that we’ve made and look at them at the same time. I know we’ve been doing most of them on your laptop, but I really need to see them all at once I think.”

“I’ll print them so we can lay them out and look at everything. Ten days until school starts and we’re only both going to be home for two of them. Tomorrow is THE organizing day. It has to be. We can’t wait until the day before school starts.”

“No, you’re right. We won’t be able to finish it until the weekend after the first week of school, but if we have everything else done, it will be better. You have to pack tomorrow too.”

“I’m so torn about going to Kentucky. Whether it goes well or not, I will have tried and that’s what counts in the end I suppose.”

Kurt turned into the driveway. “We’re back.” He shut the engine off, but didn’t move. “I’m ready to go to bed. Swimming always makes me tired.”

“I love swimming.”

“That’s what you could do.”

“What?”

“Join the swim team at school. They practice before school. It would give you that team feeling that you love so much without risking any damage to your hand.”
“I hadn’t considered it. I’m not sure I’m a good enough swimmer to compete.”

“We’ll look on the school website and see if it says when the tryouts are. It can’t hurt to try.”

“That’s true.” Sam poked Kurt in the ribs, teased him. “Are we going to try to sleep in here or are we going in?”

Kurt rolled his eyes. “In. We’re going in.” He finally opened his door and got out.

Sam made it to the door before he did and had already unlocked it and opened it. Kurt followed him inside, but made a detour to the laundry room with their wet stuff. He put the stuff out on a rack to wash the next day.

Everyone was up early Sunday morning. Kurt loaded everyone’s luggage and bags into the Navigator while Carole and Sam made breakfast. Burt was still in the shower. By the time everything was load, breakfast was ready and Burt had come out of their room ready to go.

The two and a half hour drive to Cincinnati seemed to drag on because everyone was pretty tired. They made it to the airport without any trouble. Kurt helped unload the luggage.

Burt pulled him into a hug. “Be safe on the drive back. If you get tired at all, pull over.”

“I will, Dad. You seem to forget how many times I drove to Dalton. I know this is longer than that, but I remember how to be safe on long drives. Have fun on your trip. I’m glad you’re finally getting to go.”

“Me too, bud.”

Carole hugged both of them.

Kurt said, “Have fun. We’ll be back for you on Saturday.”

Kurt went around and got into the driver’s seat. Sam was already bucking his seat belt.

“Next stop, Kentucky.”

“You’re going to stay for lunch still, right?”

“If you want me to.”

“I always want to be with you, but I think Stevie and Stacey will be bummed if you just drop me off and leave. They don’t have any idea what’s going on and you’ve always been so great with them, they look forward to you coming.”

“I might have brought Stevie a new sketchpad and a set of nice colored pencils. And I might have bought Stacey a 120-count box of Crayola’s and a couple of Lisa Frank coloring books.”

“Might have?” Sam laughed.

“Okay, so I did.”

“You spoil them.”

“Not too much. A just right amount.”
Sam reached out and put his hand on Kurt’s thigh. “It’s sweet. I’m sure that I’ll be very glad that they have something new to do while I’m there for four whole days during the daytime.”

“You brought some movies. That will entertain them for an hour and half each day.”

Sam reached down and pulled a binder out of his backpack. “I was looking through these charts…”

Nick and Jeff pulled up at 6:00, parked in the driveway, and moved their bag to Kurt’s Navigator. Nick climbed in the backseat and Jeff got up front. Kurt pulled out of the driveway.

“So, what have you been doing all week all by your lonesome?”

“Well, I’ve already worked 48 hours this week, so mostly just working, eating, and sleeping. A little laundry.”

“Woah,” Jeff said.

“Yeah. Dad is gone, so I worked from open to close the last four days. But tomorrow will be a mini one-day vacation. I’m ready to see Sam though.”

The three of them discussed their plans for the day and decided on an itinerary for their sightseeing on Saturday as they drove to pick Sam up in Kentucky. As soon as they pulled up, Jeff got out and got in the backseat with Nick. Sam tossed his bag in the cargo area and hopped in the passenger seat. He leaned in and kissed Kurt quickly. Stacey and Stevie were at the day camp at the daycare Mary worked out, so Kurt wasn’t able to see them this time.

“So, University of Cincinnati. Let’s go see what they have to offer,” Kurt said, as he pulled away from the Evans’ house.

Sam reached over and put his hand on Kurt’s leg. While they were waiting at a stoplight, Kurt picked Sam’s hand up and kissed his knuckles and laid it back down.

Once they reached the campus, they found the visitor’s parking lot. They grabbed their backpacks and satchels and started walking toward campus. As soon as Kurt’s satchel was in place, Sam grabbed Kurt’s hand and interlaced their fingers. They decided on a location to meet up for lunch and went their separate ways to visit the departments they were interested in.

Before Kurt and Sam separated, Sam guided them into the closest building and looked for an empty classroom, which was easy to find since it was the last day of the second summer session and practically all of the students were gone. Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt and held him close. “I missed you so much. I know how much I like to spend time with you, but when you’re not around I don’t have anyone to tell a funny story to or to show a funny picture to or talk to. It’s been a long four days. I’ll tell you later, but I just wanted to hold you for a few minutes.”

“I missed you too. So much.” Kurt raised his head up from Sam’s shoulder and leaned back enough to be able to kiss him. After a breathtaking kiss, he said, “I love you. There’ll be more snuggles and kisses. We need to get to where we belong.”

“Let’s go.” He leaned forward and kissed Kurt one more time.

The four of them met back up and ate lunch together. Kurt added his thoughts to the notebook he
had been using during their campus visits. He wrote down the things that Sam said as well. Once they finished eating, they walked to where they were meeting a student tour guide that would take them on a walking tour of the campus and answer any of their questions.

At the end of their tour, they asked a few questions, and they thanked their guide. After he walked away, they started to talk again. They went to see the art museum on campus, which was something they had done at each of the schools they had visited. Once the museum closed, they went back to the Navigator and went to check into their motel room.

“You two go ahead down to the pool. We’ll be down in a few minutes. I’m going to hang up my clothes first,” Kurt said.

“Okay,” Jeff winked at him. “You hang those clothes up.”

Kurt rolled his eyes. He grabbed their clothes out of his bag and hung them up, which took only a couple of minutes. The next several minutes, he spent kissing Sam and taking the edge off how worked up both of them were. They headed down to the pool and got in. Sam swam around while Kurt was just standing in the pool talking to Nick. When he got close to them, he stood up.

“I think you’re right. I don’t think I can do the breast stroke or the butterfly though, so I’d have to see if I could still compete.”

“Did you look to see when the tryouts are?”

“Thursday.”

“You might as well go see.”

“I’m going to.” He smiled and splashed Kurt and swam off to pester Jeff.

A few minutes later, Kurt looked towards them and they were having a splash technique conversation and competition. Nick and Kurt just laughed at them.

“He looks so different without his hair being blond and clipped closer like that. It still looks good, but I can’t even really imagine how Jeff would look. I haven’t seen him without it dyed blond in so long.”

“Is there a reason he dyes it?”

“He likes it, but he would try out other colors if they weren’t prohibited at school.” Nick began quoting part of some Dalton regulation. “Hair color may only be colors found naturally in humans.”

“So, once you graduate, he might dye it blue or green or something?”

“Maybe. I remember when you kept trying to do things like wear brooches that weren’t strictly forbidden since they are technically women’s jewelry according to some archaic definition you dug up from somewhere and the administration managed to consider them to be ‘tie clips beyond an acceptable size and improperly placed on your uniform’, wasn’t it?”

Kurt laughed. “Yes.”

“I’m going to miss you being at Dalton. You were by far the most interesting new student we got in the two years I’ve been there.”
“I told Sam that I was like Sully in Avatar, putting on a suit and studying the lives of alien beings.”

Nick broke out laughing. “That’s great.”

“He compared the school to the Borg.”

“Also a good one. You threw a cog in the gears. I’m hoping that we can make the Warblers a real group of friends this year.”

Their conversation stopped cold when they were splashed by both Jeff and Sam.

“Pay attention to us,” Jeff said.

“I pay attention to you every day. I don’t get to see Kurt every day anymore.”

Jeff moved closer to Kurt and wrapped his arms around him. “You’re abandoning us to go back to public school.” He mock cried. “School will be so boring without you. What will be do?”

“Stop making a scene, Jeff,” Kurt tried to scold, but he was laughing to hard to succeed. “You’ll still have Blaine jumping on all of the furniture to entertain you.”

“Ooh, good idea. I’m going to follow him next time and see what he does.”

Kurt laughed. “I don’t think he will be pleased. I think the showboating is reserved for him.”

“Pish posh. If he can do it, so can I.” Jeff turned his nose up in the air.

“I’d pay good money to see Blaine’s face when Jeff follows him on onto the furniture,” Kurt said.

Nick responded, “I’ll see what I can do. Are you ready to go get dinner?”

“Definitely,” Sam said.

“Me too,” Kurt agreed.

Jeff chimed in with, “Me three, me three.”

Kurt splash Jeff before he got out of the pool, which just made Jeff laugh. They dried off and went upstairs to their room.

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They all got out of the Navigator after Kurt parked. “Voila!”

“Jungle Jim’s? Your amazing, spectacular, awesome place for dinner is a grocery store?” Nick asked.

Jeff said, “Why did we let him plan dinner? I know there’s a Chipotle here. Mmm… burritos.”

Sam backed Kurt up. “If Kurt says it’s amazing, it must be. Come on. Let’s go inside and see what’s so spectacular about this place. How did you even find this place?” Sam took Kurt’s hand and interlaced their fingers and squeezed a little.

“I had to go to the bathroom on the way back from dropping you off in Kentucky. I didn’t think about how I was dressed in bondage shorts and that ripped up layered t-shirt until I thought about where I could go to the bathroom. And I didn’t want to get killed at some rest stop or behind some
old-fashioned gas station with the restroom on the backside. So, I pulled off the next exit and looked to see what was in the area. I figured no one would have the nerve to stab me in a grocery store, so I drove a couple of blocks, parked, and went inside.”

By then they had made it to the door and they stepped inside. The three of them were all wide-eyed.

“This place is huge,” Jeff said.

“And more than that, they have a bazillion different kinds of everything. It’s not like a Sam’s Club where they have 400 cans of the same green beans. I love Sam’s Club as much as the next person for feeding big groups of people, but this place is so cool. I ended up wandering around in here for an hour before I left to check out the Ikea that’s like 10 minutes from here. After that I drove back to Lima. But we can’t leave until you’ve seen the bathrooms.”

Nick grabbed a cart and they meandered their way through the store.

They slept in the next morning, knowing that they’d be up pretty late that evening with Burt and Carole’s flight not landing until 8pm even thought they had boarded at midnight Hawaii time the night before. Their return flight had two layovers making it a 15-hour trip.

One they were up and ready, they grabbed their bags and went down to grab some free coffee and a bagel. Kurt and Sam skipped the bagel and opted for a banana and an apple.

“We still need to get some more food. I can’t walk around the zoo all day on just a bagel,” Jeff said.

“You pick,” Kurt said.

“Arby’s.”

“For breakfast?”

“Their ham and cheese sandwiches are really good. They’re all hot with melty gooey white cheese. Mmm.”

“Alright then, guide me, oh seeker of a ham sandwich,” Kurt teased.

When they got back in the Navigator, Nick asked, “So, what did you think?”

“I loved it, but I don’t really have anything to compare it to. That’s the first zoo I’ve ever been to,” Kurt said.

“Me too,” Sam agreed. “But I thought it was awesome. Maybe Stevie and Stacey will get to go on a field trip there some time.”

“They’d love it,” Kurt said. “Next stop, Chipotle as Jeff was the one to plan tonight’s dinner. Then, the airport. Actually, I’m going to put the third row seat up now. It will be easier to do it here than at the airport.”

He got out and Jeff and Nick helped him pull their bags out. He put the seat up in position and they put the bags back in. They all got back in.

“Now, next stop, Chipotle.”
Kurt thought they’d be entertained by stories from the trip on their way back to Lima, but instead both Burt and Carole fell asleep within 10 minutes of being in the SUV. With Nick and Jeff being in the third row and Kurt’s parents asleep, they took advantage of the darkness and started kissing. Kurt just shook his head and smiled and wished their positions were reversed. He put a CD in and he and Sam sang along quietly a lot of the time. Sam kept his hand on Kurt’s leg most of the drive. Eventually, Nick fell asleep leaning against Jeff, who was also asleep with his head tipped back. They finally made it back to Lima a little before midnight. Kurt offered to let Nick and Jeff sleep over, but they assured him that their nap was quite enough to keep them awake for the 30-minute drive home.
Sunday morning, they resigned themselves to an abbreviated version of their Sunday Snuggles. They lay in bed for a couple of hours, snuggling, kissing, touching, and just enjoying a time of quiet and comfort. Around 10:00, they got up, got dressed, and went down to eat a late breakfast. Finn was on his way out to the last day of football camp and was running down the stairs when they started down them.

Kurt got a skillet out and heated up some butter. He pulled out eggs and some leftover vegetables and made them a big veggie omelette to split. Sam poured them some orange juice and put it on the table. Kurt brought their plates in and they began to eat.

“So, tomorrow is our last first day of regular school. We’re seniors. This first week is going to be weird because I’m still working a ton of hours since we only have class for two hours each morning. That’s going to be so weird.”

“It is. We have to drive to Toledo tomorrow for my appointment at 1:00.”

“We’re leaving from school after first period ends at 10:00. I want to go back to the lake for a little bit. And after your appointment, Panera might be calling my name.”

“You should ignore that. You might need help for your asiago bagel issue.”

Kurt laughed. “They’re so good.”

“I know. That’s what all addictions do. They lure you. They tempt you.” He leaned toward Kurt and kissed his temple. He wrapped his arm around Kurt’s shoulder protectively and looked around the room like there were things hiding waiting to jump out and get them. “I’ll keep those siren bagels from luring your to your doom. I promise.”

Kurt cracked up. They finished eating, interspersed with looking at each other and laughing again.

Carole came in. “What so funny now? Another t-shirt idea? I haven’t seen the rooster one yet.” She sat down at the table.

“I need to get on that this week. Perfect timing with Kurt spending so much time at the shop. I need to go to Goodwill and buy a red t-shirt.”

“The laughing wasn’t because of a t-shirt. I mentioned maybe going to Panera tomorrow when we’re in Toledo and Sam offered to protect me from the asiago bagels that are luring me to my doom.”

She laughed at the two of them. “I see. So, you’re the Carb Slayer or something?”

“Something like that.”

She just shook her head. “How is your therapy going?”

“Well, I missed last week because I was in Kentucky, and I started seeing a new therapist named Phil who is an occupational therapist instead of a physical therapist. Phil said that we were going to start something called Handwriting without Tears this week. It’s supposed to help me with my handwriting. I guess it’s usually for younger kids, like Stacey’s age, I’m all for it if it works. My
handwriting was terrible before. If he knows something to make it legible, then all the better for me. I’m also going to talk to him about what there might be to help me improve my ‘tripod grip’ as he calls it – my ability to hold a pencil or paintbrush. I’ve MacGyvered a way to be able to paint because I was going stir crazy, but it’s not a long-term solution. Hopefully, someone has designed something more professional to help with this kind of thing. I’m not even going to worry about the cost. I’ll turn it into Hiram and he can add it to my rehabilitative costs. They’re fighting on paying my lost wages, they can at least pay for whatever devices might exist to make me able to function better.”

Carole propped her elbows on the table and then crossed them, letting her fists fall toward the table. “This whole situation is so frustrating and I know it’s more than that for you.”

“I have a couple of appointments at OSU Lima on Tuesday – one to see the disability coordinator and one to talk to the pottery instructor. I’m going to ask the orthopedist about joining the swim team tomorrow. I need to do something. All this sitting around is killing me. Kurt did get me some cool picks though, so I’ve been playing my guitar again. Not as well as I could before, but at least I can play.”

Kurt said, “Today we’re compiling all of the notes and research we have on the colleges we’ve visited. We don’t want to waste money applying to schools we don’t want to go to, but we need to apply to enough that we have a decent chance of getting into a couple of them. The early admissions deadlines are in October and November. We’re going to try for that at our two top schools. If we don’t get in, we’ll try for regular admission at our other back-up choices.”

“Sounds reasonable to me.” She stood up. “I have to go out and do the shopping. I’ll be back as soon as I’m done.” She stopped before she got out of the room. “I forgot to tell you that I got that position I applied for. I start tomorrow morning. It’s three days on, four days off, with 12-hour shifts. So, I’m scheduled Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. There will be times that people ask to trade or I get offered an extra day due to someone needing off on Thursday through Saturday. I’ll make just a tiny bit less than I do now, unless I work and extra shift, but I will have a set schedule. I feel like I’ve won the lottery. I’m getting too old for this rotating days and shifts thing and never being able to plan without rushing at the last minute to switch with someone when I got scheduled on days I had asked off.”

“Oh, wow,” Kurt said. “I know you’ve applied several times to places with set hours. Congratulations.”

“I have, but everyone wants to hire the most experienced person they can find. I’m not sure whether I should feel flattered or old, but I have 20 years of experience and I want a day job too much to care.”

“You’re not old. And ‘experienced’ somehow has this negative connotation to it in a way. Let’s see. ‘Skilled’. How’s that? You’re a highly-skilled professional with a day job.”

“I like the sound of it. I had to get some new scrubs. We can wear any color pants, but I had to get some fun, bright-colored, kid-friendly prints. I ordered Lilo and Stitch and some other fun ones. That’s what was in that box that came last week when we were gone. I have to try them on later to make sure they fit when I get back. I’ll see you two later.”

“If you need them tailored let me know. We’ll be up in our room if you need us for anything,” Kurt said. He got up and picked his dishes up as well as Sam’s and put them in the dishwasher.

Carole followed them through the kitchen and a couple of minutes later, they heard the front door shut.
Sam waited for him and followed him up the stairs.

“Why didn’t you go on up?”

“Better view this way.”

Kurt swayed his hips the rest of the way up the stairs and down the hall.

Sam closed the door behind them and locked it. “You’re making me want to get you back in bed.”

“I’m amenable to that. What’s your most persuasive argument for this proposition?”

Sam leaned in and whispered in his ear. Kurt took off across the room and was undressed in a flash.

Sam smiled and sauntered over like there was nothing making him rush, but Kurt could see the expression in his eyes.

“It looks like someone unwrapped my present for me already. Hmm. Should I be grateful or aggravated that I didn’t get to do it myself?”

“Definitely grateful. You can do it yourself next time.”

Sam leaned down and kissed him. “You can unwrap me, then.”

They spent the rest of the morning and the early afternoon working on their college sorting. Around 1:00, Carole knocked on their open door.

“Yeah, Carole? Come in.”

“I brought you something back from the hardware store. She placed the item on the table between them.

“A keyed doorknob?”

“Yep. Right now, you can only lock your door when you’re inside the room. Install this, and your stuff will be safe from the prying eyes of any jocks that come over.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. After you’re certain that it works, you can go have a spare key made for me since it only comes with two.”

“We’ll do that. I think we’re going out to Goodwill in a little bit, after we finish what we’re working on.”

“Okay, now that that’s done, you can make a shopping list on your phone while I put the new doorknob on. I’ll be back with the tools.” Kurt came back up a few minutes later with a toolbox.

“So, a red t-shirt?”

“Of course. And we’ll give it one last shot and if we don’t find hoodies the right color today, we’re just going to have to search online and order them. We found the jeans you needed and my Levi’s are fine for mine. We still need to order the wigs, so we’ll order the hoodies then if we don’t find them today. We need time to wash them or do something to make them look distressed, not new and
Kurt had gotten the doorknob off. “I’ll be right back. I should have brought a ziplock bag up to put the pieces in.” He was gone and back quickly. “So, anything else? Stuff for school? Art supplies?”

“The only thing I’ve considered is carrying a messenger bag like you do instead of a backpack. With my hand the way it is, trying to hold the backpack to get stuff out of it is a pain. With a messenger bag, I could just put it on diagonal and use my left hand to pull stuff out.”

“We’ll look at Goodwill. Add that to the list.” He put the tools in the toolbox. He picked up the keys and pulled the door shut. He locked it, and then unlocked it and opened it. “Seems to work.” He took one of the keys off and put it on his keyring. He took the other over to Sam, who pulled his keyring out and handed it to Kurt. “There.” He handed it back. “I’ll go put the tools away. Just get your shoes and come down.”

“I can’t believe you actually ordered this,” Sam said. “Finn is going to freak out.”

Kurt put the book on the table in their room and cut a piece of wrapping paper to fit. He wrapped it neatly before he answered. “I told him. You were there.”

“But I never gave it another thought after that conversation.”

“I did obviously.”

“Obviously,” Sam laughed. “He’s going to need a locked file box. I’ll tell him where to get one or maybe get him one. You’re just lucky your parents don’t open your mail.”

“Can you imagine the look on my dad’s face?”

Imitating Burt voice, Sam said, “Son, is there something we need to talk about?”

Kurt broke out laughing. “That’s perfect. Absolutely perfect.” He put the tape and scissors away. “Bring that roll of wrapping paper and I’ll bring the laundry. We need to get the rest of it done. I have a fabulous outfit to pick out for tomorrow.”

“I’m going with the ever popular jeans and a t-shirt look made famous and infamous by teen guys since the 1950’s.”

“And you look so hot in it.” Kurt stepped close enough to Sam to reach him and grab his shirt and pulled him close and kissed up his neck.

“So do you. Spiked up hair, ripped up shirts, tight jeans – showing off your assets.” Sam reached around and grabbed Kurt’s butt with his left hand while keeping his right arm wrapped around him, holding him close.

“So you think I should try rocking the bad boy look tomorrow? I have a black leather jacket just like you do.”

“Ooh, for Halloween we should dress up as Danny Zuko and Kinickie.”

“That could be fun. My hair’s not dark enough. I’d have to look into what I could use on it that wouldn’t hurt it.” Kurt kissed him again before stepping away. “Laundry.”

Sam stepped closer. “Necking.” He started kissing up the side of Kurt’s neck.
“Oh, God that feels so good. You’re distracting me.”

“I know.” He kissed up and started nipping and Kurt’s ear. “One load of laundry and more kissing. Sunday is supposed to be our snuggle day.”

Kurt managed to get out, “One load,” before he moved enough to start kissing Sam.

They were kissing like there would be no tomorrow when someone knocked on the door. Kurt attempted to readjust himself and walked to the door and opened it.

“Hey, honey. I saw you were back. I thought I’d come up and get the extra key.”

“Sure.” He took a step to the right and picked it up off his dresser and handed it to her. “Thanks again for getting it for us. I’ll feel a lot better knowing that no one is in here messing around with my stuff. I have no proof that they did before, but now they won’t be able to.”

“You’re welcome. It helps Finn too. This way he doesn’t have to be concerned if someone comes upstairs. He always tried to keep them corralled downstairs.”

“We were actually on our way down in a few minutes. Can I just give you this roll of wrapping paper?”

“Sure.” She took it.

“Thanks.” He shut and locked the door back. He walked straight back over to Sam. “Back to the important thing I was doing before she knocked.”

Later that night, they took a long shower, put music on, and got in bed a little earlier than usual. Kurt was lying on Sam’s chest gently running his hand along Sam’s torso.

“How do you think everyone will react to us being together? I mean I know they said they would be supportive, but honestly we haven’t seen anyone except Finn this summer, and that’s only been the last couple of weeks.”

“I think everything is going to be different. With the new class schedule and Figgins being gone permanently and Coach Beiste being the principal, I think it will all be really different. Supposedly there’s going to be new teachers too. So, hopefully the whole atmosphere will be different. But I’m going to walk in with my arm around you and hold my head high because I don’t care what they think. I’m hoping that the Glee Club accepts us, but if they don’t, they don’t. The class won’t be cancelled if there aren’t 12 people, so if we decide to leave, they will all still get to sing, just maybe not compete.”

“That’s true. The pressure to win is off, as far as keeping the club going is concerned.”

“I did have one idea tonight when I was standing in the bathroom doorway talking to you while you were doing your face stuff.”

“What?”

“What would you think of putting a big wall calendar on the wall between the bathroom door and the alcove window? It seems like a good place. We’d see it before we go in there every night to shower and then again when we get ready in the morning. We’ve got so many things to keep track of. I know we put it in our phones, but we can only see the details a day at a time. We could hang
like three months on the wall and rotate them up one space when the month ends.”

“That’s an excellent idea. It’s the perfect spot. We’ll get one when we’re out tomorrow. I had actually thought about how cool that magnetic paint would be to use, but I never came up with a good use for it, but that would be a good use. We could paint that whole wall with magnetic paint and then we could just use magnets to hold up the calendar pages and whatever else we want to.”

“That sounds cool. I’ve never actually seen or used the magnetic paint. Let’s get that too.”

“Let’s sleep. We could talk all night. We are both jabber boxes or chatty Cathies or whatever.”

Sam used his best Sean Connery voice, “I think the term is ‘refined young men of varying interests who enjoy the fine art of conversation.’”

Kurt laughed, then stopped and attempted his best distinguished gentleman impression. “A fair point. Chatty Cathies say nothing of importance, whilst we engage in quite erudite conversations, much like Holmes and Watson.”

“Robert Down Jr. and Jude Law or Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman?”

“Nope. No more talking.” He gently put his finger over Sam’s lips. “Sleeping.”

Sam mumbled, “Kissing?” as he ran his hand along Kurt’s upper arm.

“Kissing, then sleeping.”

After the 15-minute “Welcome Back to McKinley” pep rally where Coach Beiste reminded everyone of the No Bullying policy, everyone was dismissed to go to their first period classes. Sam had worn his hand brace to school. He had never been released from wearing it officially, only told to use it when he might get reinjured or to be cautious. Kurt held his hand, even though it wasn’t that easy to do. They decided to keep Sam’s injured hand between them rather than risk someone knocking into it with a stack or books or a book bag.

They made it to the choir room and took two seats in the upper row on the right. Almost everyone from the previous year arrived before the bell rang. Right after the bell, Mr. Schuester came into the room.

“Mr. Schue?” Rachel said loudly.

“Yes, Rachel. It’s me. I’ll answer some questions later. First I have three new students to introduce.”

In walked a girl about Quinn’s height and build with auburn hair and a loud sense of fashion, wearing sunglasses. “Hi. I’m Sugar Motta. I’m super excited to be here. My family just moved here from Chicago and I’m a sophomore.”

“Thanks, Sugar. Have a seat. You can sing for us in a few minutes.”

“Sure thing. I’m a great singer.” She sat down on the front row, not far from Artie.

Next a tall, slender guy with dark hair and blue eyes came in. He stood at the front and smiled. “I’m Rory Flanagan. I’m here from Ireland as an exchanged student for the year and I live with Brittany. I’m a sophomore.”

“We have one final new addition to the group, and most of you will recognize him.”
Everyone looked confused, trying to think of someone they’d all know who would join Glee. Kurt noticed that Rachel sat up straight and looked very pleased.

“Hey, everyone. I’m Blaine Anderson and I’m a junior. As most of you already know, I’m a tenor. He looked at the band and they started to play. Blaine blasted out “It’s Not Unusual” and pulled Santana and Brittany out of their chairs to dance with him. He was wearing red chinos, a black polo, and a bow tie and looked like he had planned the spontaneous dancing and wore clothes to match the girls’ Cheerios uniforms.

Rachel clapped wildly when he finished. The rest of the group was little more subdued in their reaction, but applauded. The look on Finn’s face wasn’t quite readable. Blaine sat in the empty seat next to Rachel.

“Rory’s going to sing for us next.”

Rory went down front and stood in front of the piano. “This is just a funny song that my daideo, sorry my grandpa, taught me when I was a wee lad.” Brad started to play the piano and Rory sang “All God’s Children Got a Place in the Choir,” singing the high, middle, and low solos himself.

Everyone clapped when he finished. He smiled somewhat shyly and went back to sit next to Brittany.

“Wow, guys. That was great. Both of you. We haven’t ever had a bass, so that will be completely new for us. Sugar, you’re up.”

Brad started the intro and Sugar launched into an ear-killing version of “Big Spender”. She was absolutely into her performance with her attitude and some choreography, but she had seemingly no singing talent whatsoever.

“Holy sh… Sugar. Thank you. That was done with so much enthusiasm. Have a seat, please.”

“You’re welcome,” she said flippantly accepting the compliment she knew that she was due.

“So, now to answer your questions. Yes, I did enjoy working in Crossrhodes, but as much as I enjoyed it, I realized that it isn’t what I want to do forever. I realized that the day-to-day performing the same show over and over again doesn’t fit with my personality. I like the spontaneity of working on different pieces and working with all of you. I am no longer a Spanish teacher here, though. I’m now part of the history department.”

Everyone looked confused, and Kurt added a look of confusion to his face to not stand out from the rest of the group.

“So, that’s that. Today we’re going to start with some vocal warm ups and sight singing. Please move your bags and stuff out of the way and move down to the first two rows – Rory to the right and Rachel to the left. Everyone else find your places in between.”

Kurt sat with Sam behind Blaine and Puck.

“We have 8 guys and 6 girls. Kurt can you please sit with the girls and sing alto? Brittany and Sugar – sing the alto part. Santana and Tina – sing the second soprano part. And Rachel and Mercedes – sing the soprano part. Rory on bass. Finn, Mike, and Artie on Baritone. Puck, Sam, and Blaine on tenor.”

Mr. Schuester passed sheet music out to everyone. Kurt merely slid his chair so that he was sitting behind Brittany and Sugar. Sam moved his chair closer to Kurt’s.

“Well, I wanted to start with something different this year.”

“You succeeded,” Kurt said under his breath.

“Plus, since this class is for a regular grade now, I have to actually teach music reading, musical notation, and things I can give written quizzes on.”

One of the jazz band members went to sit on the piano stool with Brad so that all six parts could be played simultaneously.

“So, we’re going to run through the first two pages of each part separately so that you get a feel for how this piece goes. If you have no idea how to read music or sight sing, feel free to participate by listening. But before we even do that, I want to play this song for you once, at least the 2-3 minutes of it that we’re going to work on. That way you’ll have some idea of how it goes. Try to follow along in your music.”

The rest of the class passed doing various warm ups, exercises and working on the song. Once the bell rang, everyone started to get up. Blaine walked over to Kurt.

“It’s great to see you, Kurt. It’s going to be really exciting to be here. I’m psyched that maybe New Directions will make it to Nationals again this year.”

“I hope we do. Why are you at McKinley?”

“Oh,” he looked around and lowered his voice. “My parents are getting a divorce and my mom’s aunt lives here by herself in a pretty big house. The divorce isn’t finalized, and with everything in limbo my mom can’t try to take out a mortgage, so my great aunt is letting us live with her while everything is finalized. My mom put in a transfer to the Lima Branch a couple of weeks ago for a position that was open. We moved in last week. So, we’ll be here for the school year. I’m not sure whether my mom will buy a house or we’ll just stay where we are for now. It would make more sense to just stay with my great aunt since she has the room. My dad refused to pay my tuition to Dalton when I said I’d rather live with my mom. So, here I am. It will be great though. With the new No Bullying policy, we shouldn’t have the kind of trouble you had last year. I have to go figure out where my next class is. See ya!”

Sugar had been waiting to talk to Kurt, but was across the room looking in her compact fixing her lip gloss. She waited until Blaine had left to approach Kurt and Sam. “I just had to tell you that that vintage Dior shirt looks great with the Dolce pants. I’m not sure what I think of the Docs with it in general, but you rock the look, totally.”

“Thanks. I’m Kurt Hummel.”

“Sam Evans.”

Sugar slid her sunglasses down her nose a bit and gave Sam a once-over. “Who is totally adorable in that vintage 7 for All Mankind camo-ish button-up paired with nice fitting Levi’s. It was nice to meet the two of you.” She turned on her heel and flounced out of the room.

Kurt took Sam’s hand and they went out to the parking lot. “Well, she’s interesting.”

Sam laughed. “Definitely interesting.”
Kurt parked in the lot near the beach. They changed to shorts in the back seat and traded their shoes for flip-flops before heading down to the water. Sam wrapped his arm around Kurt’s waist as they waded along the edge. Kurt leaned into him and wrapped his arm around Sam’s waist as well.

“Something’s up with Blaine and Rachel. She wasn’t surprised that he was here. And she’s very excited about it.”

“I’d rather just not think about it.”

Kurt stopped. Sam turned to look at him. Kurt moved so that he was facing Sam and wrapped his arms around him. “You don’t think I like him, do you?”

“No. But I know he’s a big spotlight hog. And he and Rachel looked pretty chummy, which only spells disaster as far as I see. And I didn’t appreciate Mr. Schue making you sing alto. After him insisting that you sing with the guys last fall, it just surprised me.”

“Our group is unbalanced. I’m not sure how to fix that. We need two more girls. Well one, if we can get Quinn back. I don’t know where she was today. We can try to hang around after class tomorrow and look for her. Maybe she moved over the summer. Maybe Lauren too, but I got the impression she wouldn’t be returning if she and Puck broke up. I’m figuring that Mr. Schue asked me to sing alto for today because Sugar can’t sing and Brittany doesn’t read music that well and it takes her a while to learn her part and without Quinn to listen to, he probably figured it would be a disaster.”

Kurt kissed Sam. “We aren’t performing that anywhere anyway. I liked the lesson. For once, he was actually trying to teach something about music, not just something about era the music was popular in. There’s plenty of crazy at McKinley to deal with when we’re there. Let’s just enjoy our time here.”

“I like kissing on the beach.” He wrapped his arms around Kurt.

“Mmm. Me too. I love you. You have absolutely nothing to worry about.”

“I know and I love you too.” He slid his hands down Kurt’s sides and took Kurt’s right hand. He stepped back and caused their arms to extend between them and the tugged Kurt toward him.

He caught on and turned and spiraled into Sam’s chest gently and put his free hand on Sam’s shoulder. Sam moved his right hand to Kurt’s waist and led them in a music-less dance along the water, moving to the sounds of nature as they waded. Both of them smiled in contentment of just being together and enjoying themselves.

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Dr. Rouher came in the room. “Good afternoon, gentlemen. Have you started back to school yet?”

Sam answered. “Today was our first day.”

“Let’s take a look at your hand.” He picked Sam’s hand up and carefully examined it, having Sam flex, grip, bend, and move it in a variety of ways. He gave him a pen and asked him to write something on sheet of paper. “Well, Sam, I think there was more damage to other parts of your hand than were originally noticeable given how swollen your hand was originally. The surgery went well, but I would have expected you to regain more flexibility and overall use by now. How much pain are you still in?”

“I’m not really in a lot of pain. Like it doesn’t really hurt to touch my hand anywhere. I don’t seem to have lost any feeling. There’s no numbness. But my grip strength and fine motor movements are really a mess. I’m supposed to start a pottery class next week. Am I going to be able to do that?”
"I honestly see no reason why other than your limited ability to use your hand right now. I don’t know how well you’ll be able to do what you want to do, but there’s nothing keeping you from trying. I’m still keeping you on lifting and weight-bearing restrictions just because of the continued swelling. If that hasn’t dramatically decreased in the next month, I’m afraid I may have to go back in to have another look to see if something else is damaged. Work with your therapists on how to best approach being able to do pottery work. You still need to support your hand above the wrist line. A fingerless compression glove is what I’m going to send you home with and a different brace. Maybe you can wear a long surgical glove over it and keep from getting the glove covered with clay."

"The guys who did this to me are counter filing because they don’t want to continue to pay for lost wages. I can’t think of anything I can do besides cashier or greeter. And even the cashier positions I’ve looked at have a clause that says ‘Must be able to lift 50 pounds.’ in the requirements. And that’s not possible right now. And they hire elderly people or people in wheelchairs to be the greeter."

"I will write a letter stating that I am not releasing you to work until after a follow-up visit in a month. And just because I said the pottery class is okay, doesn’t mean you can use that hand to beat and shape stiff clay. I’m assuming this is some type of pottery wheel work that involves water and spinning the clay."

"Yes, sir. I also have an appointment to talk to the instructor tomorrow. If she doesn’t see a way to make it work, I’ll have to find a different class to take. I have one last question. Can I join the swim team at school?"

"I don’t see why not. You’ll have to work with your therapist on increasing your range of motion more than likely, but as a form of exercise it sounds great. I know you used to lift weights and you can’t do that now. Swimming will help keep you fit. I’ll send Edna in to fit you with the compression glove and new brace, along the instructions on when to wear it. Make your follow-up appointment for a month from now. After that, you can wait in the waiting room for the letter to give to your attorney."

"Thank you."

"You’re welcome."

"Panera," Sam said.

"Panera."

"I’m having one of those asiago bagels too."

"I thought you were going to protect me from the siren bagels."

"I’ve been lured in by their song. There’s no hope for us now,” he said, dramatically putting his hand against his forehead.

Kurt laughed at his antics. “We could get a bagel sandwich, a bowl of soup, and a salad and split all of it.”

"Perfect. I’m starving. Breakfast was a long time ago."

“So, we eat and then hit some of the second-hand and vintage stores. I know we said yesterday was our last effort to find the hoodies, but we’re here and it’s fun to look around anyway."
“That’s fine as long as we eat first. Hear that? My stomach is growling so loud.” Sam changed his voice to sound deep and rumbly. “Feed me! Feed me! Feed me!”

Kurt laughed and kept driving.

They savored every bite of their lunch. Afterwards, they looked through three stores, finding a few things that Kurt just had to have and a couple that he really liked on Sam and bought for him, despite Sam’s protests, which became non-existent when Kurt kissed him in the dressing room.

They did manage to find a vintage brown hoodie the color they had been looking for in the fourth store they went to. They also found a vintage black messenger bag that Sam liked.

On their way back to the Navigator from their last stop at the office supply store, Kurt’s phone pinged and he pulled it out and saw that Finn was texting him. He opened the text.

--Kurt, this is D. I borrowed Finn’s phone. Meet me where we met the last time in an hour. If you’re not there, I’ll know you didn’t get the message in time. I’ll wait for 30 minutes after I get there. Don’t reply. I’m deleting this from his log.

“Alright, I guess we’re going to Cracker Barrel. I just got a text from Dave.”

When they got there, they told the hostess their party was waiting for them. They found Dave near where they had sat before. He had already started eating what he had ordered. Sam sat next to the wall and Kurt sat across from Dave.

“I’ll buy you dinner, if you’re hungry.”

“No, thanks,” Sam said. “We ate a few hours ago. A drink would be good though.”

“Sure. I’ll grab the waitress when she comes around. So, I have the money I owe you. It’s a bank check.” Dave handed him an envelope with Kurt’s name and address on the outside. He caught the server’s attention and order drinks for Kurt and Sam.

“I was supposed to mail it, but I wanted to give it to you in person. Oh, and I don’t know why you would want to text me, but that number I texted you from back in June wasn’t my phone. I can’t risk my mom seeing my phone bill and call log and finding your number on it.”

“I figured. I didn’t tell the police about the text. My dad has video surveillance and someone saw them grabbing Sam and video taped it, and then called 911.”

“Yeah. I know. Azimio gave me an earful after his parents signed the plea agreement.” Dave continued to eat.

The server came toward them and put their drinks down.

Kurt waited until she had walked away before he said anything else. “His mother is not pleased. She says that his brothers aren’t like him. It doesn’t matter. He’s not at McKinley anymore. Was there a reason you wanted to see us instead of mailing the check?”

“Yeah,” Dave said. “I wanted to thank you for the camp idea. I had a fairly decent summer even though it was pretty hot without air conditioning. I made enough to pay you back for the damages and save some. And my good news is that for my 18th birthday, my dad signed my truck over to me, so it actually belongs to me now.”
“That’s great. Now, if anything happens, you can just leave without risking your parents calling the police on you for stealing the truck.”

He took a few more bites before he said anything else. “I also bought a week’s worth of clothes at Goodwill and washed and dried them, like you suggested. I packed them in a cheap duffle I bought there too and I stuffed it under my truck seat.”

“Good.”

“Azimio tried to convince me to transfer to North Lima so we could still play football together. That’s where they all transferred. I told him absolutely not. I’ve already got everything worked out with McKinley. He was the one that went and got himself expelled. Plus, I’m glad he’s gone. I knew it would be nearly impossible to keep up a fake friendship with him all school year. My mom forbade me to spend any time with him anyway after she heard through the grapevine about what they did to Sam. She’s all for convincing people of their depravity verbally, otherwise known as insulting and harassing them. But she’s adamantly opposed to actually physically injuring anyone because it’s against the law to assault people. We have to follow the law.”

Kurt rolled his eyes. “I’m just glad you made it to 18. Now, you can make it, even if it’s hard. Just remember, you can still go to Aunt Eunice’s if you need to.”

“I appreciate that – more than I can say. You’ve been kinder to me that the people I’ve supposedly been friends with most of my life.” He finished up his meal. “How’s your hand doing?”

“That’s where we were,” Sam said. “In Toledo. The orthopedist said that it’s not doing as well as he hoped. I’m going to go to therapy twice a week now according to the paper he gave me today. I got this new brace and a compression wrap for when I’m not wearing the brace. I can’t go back to work until I see him a month from now. I may have to have exploratory surgery if it’s not remarkably better.”

Dave just shook his head. He started to cry. He wiped his eyes and tried to get a grip on himself. “I’m just so sorry. I did so many awful things. I struggle not to just give up sometimes. No matter how long I wait, my mother will disown me. And once I’ve moved out, I think my dad will not side with her in opinion, but he will stay with her. Maybe not. It doesn’t matter.”

“I think you need to talk to someone, like someone at the Trevor project. When you’re at the OSU Lima campus, use one of the school computers to make a new email for yourself and contact them that way. Maybe you can make friends with someone that will let you use their phone and you can call the hotline. I don’t know. Don’t give up. Please. Yes, you did awful things, but you’ve changed.”

“I’ll do what you said. I look it up. Maybe I could get a cheap prepaid phone and just buy like minutes just to call to talk to someone who can help me.”

“Santana. You two are still dating. She has an unlimited phone plan. Maybe you could just use her phone.”

“Good idea. I’ll talk to her.” He looked at his phone. “I’ve gotta go. I’ll pay and you two can leave whenever you want.”

“Once you get that new email, you can email me, and if you want to talk, you can contact me that way.”

Dave nodded and got up. He took the bill with him and left.
During dinner that evening, Carole asked about Sam’s doctor’s visit. He explained what the doctor had said. Kurt asked about her first day at her new job and her face lit up. She talked for quite a while about how much she really thought it was going to be a great place to work.

Kurt told them that he had gotten a check from Dave, but didn’t mention meeting up with him since Dave didn’t want anyone to know about it. Burt was thrilled that he had finally paid Kurt what he had agreed to. Carole told him that there was a letter for him in the mail that afternoon. He excused himself to go get it. He opened it. It was a check from Mrs. Adams for the amount of money he had told her. Kurt was shocked. He put it back in the envelope and they continued to talk.

He and Sam told her about all of the lovely things they had seen in the shops they had been in. Kurt got up and brought back the bag his purchases were in. He showed her a brooch and a scarf he had bought. Sam told her that he had found a hoodie he had been looking for and a satchel for school since using a backpack was hard.

Burt asked them if they needed anything for school still and they told him that they had already been to an office supply store earlier in the day. Sam mentioned waiting until his classes at the university started before he bought anything because he needed the art supply list.

Carole had Sam follow her to the garage while Kurt and Burt cleaned up the dishes. She showed him where she had stored the extra key to their room on the off chance that they managed to lock themselves out sometime. While he was out there, he asked about Finn and found out that he had gone to Puck’s after football practice.

When they got back inside, Sam went back to the kitchen and helped put the dishes away. Once everything was done, he and Kurt went up to their room.

Sam came out of the bathroom and stood and looked at the blank wall. “We still need to go to Lowe’s to get the magnetic paint. We can go do that tomorrow morning. Surely I can use a roller and paint the wall with my left hand. I’ve gotten much more ambidextrous that I used to be.”

Kurt was lying back against the pillows on the bed. “If it’s too hard, you can just stop and I’ll work on it when I get home. I’m working 12-8 tomorrow, but we shouldn’t have much homework and it won’t be due until Thursday, even if we do. I think your wall calendar is a really good idea. We’re going to have to be careful and not let our work pile up since none of our classes meet daily.”

“It’s really different, but it’s like the university schedule.”

“We’ll go by Michael’s and get the super strong magnets too. We can make them really cool somehow. You can think about it. I wish I weren’t working all day tomorrow. Come snuggle me for a little bit before we go down and watch Warehouse 13.”

Sam smiled and walked around the bed to lie down with Kurt.

After they had showered, Kurt was snuggled up behind Sam in bed. “I know something is bothering you and I won’t push you to tell me what it is. But if you want to tell me at some point, I would be glad to listen, even if you’re just throwing yourself another pity party.”

“I sort of went against my parents wishes when I was in Kentucky.”
Kurt placed a gentle kiss on the back of Sam’s neck.

“Monday morning when Stacey got up, she ate breakfast and we sat down to color because Stevie was already drawing. He had gotten up before she had. So, we were sitting around the table. Stacey told me that her friend Andrea had admired her princess braid the day before and she told her that you had done it. Well, Andrea is already well-indoctrinated and she told Stacey that only gay boys knew how to do girly things like that.”

“Oh, man…”

“Yeah, so since Stacey didn’t know what it meant, she just didn’t say anything at the time, but she asked me what ‘gay’ means. I explained it to her and she was pretty much unfazed. She asked why people care who other people like. I explained to her that some people believe that being gay is bad and wicked. She was shocked. I explained to her that a lot of people who go to church teach that gay people are bad. And she straight up asked me if you are gay. I didn’t want to lie to my brother and sister, so I said yes. And her immediate response was, and I quote, ‘People who think gay people are wicked never met Kurt. He’s the nicest boy besides you I’ve ever met.’”

“She’s sweet.”

“So she defended the honor of all gay people everywhere because she knows that you are a kind and generous person. I was up front and I explained to her that there are good gay people and bad gay people just like there are good people and bad people that aren’t gay – because gay people are just people. But I explained to her that even though not everyone believes that gay people are bad, there are lots and lots of people who do. She remained skeptical. I showed her some photos of Westboro Baptist Church picketing. She can read. She was shocked and sad. She asked about their church – if that’s what people there believe. I answered truthfully. She doesn’t want to go back. Neither does Stevie. He was less vocal at the time, but he thought about it while we were talking.”

Sam was quiet for a while. Kurt caressed his upper arm and kissed his shoulder.

“So, they both let it drop and we spent the day reading, drawing, playing games, and watching a movie later that afternoon. But it wasn’t over. Stacey decided to try out her questions on my parents. So, she told them the same thing she had told me about Andrea. And she asked them similar questions. She was not pleased with their answers. She defended you even more strongly to them. ‘Kurt is the nicest boy. He can’t be wicked. Those people are wrong.’ She went on at length. When my parents didn’t say much, she quieted down. Stevie was the one who asked the question no one wanted to hear. He said, ‘Kurt’s gay.’ I nodded. He said, ‘You love him. I can see it in your eyes when he’s around and you smile all the time when you talk about him. You’re gay too, aren’t you?’”

“Oh, no.”

“Stacey perked up. ‘Are you going to get married? Can I be the flower girl? Will I get a fancy pretty white dress like Ashley got when her sister got married?”

“Oh, dear. What did your parents do?”

“They intervened quickly pointing out that I was still in high school and too young to get married. Stacey pouted and regrouped. She decided that she will be our flower girl as soon as we are old enough to get married and she wasn’t going to listen to what anyone else said. She said that since it wasn’t going to be soon, it gave her enough time to look for the perfect white dress to wear.”

“She’s a hoot.”
“She’s a giant Kurt stan. If you ever get famous, expect her to start the Kurt Hummel Fan Club.”

Kurt laughed.

“My parents tried to explain to them how it would be best to not talk about these kinds of things with their friends and Stacey launched into a long-winded rant about how it was a free country and she’d say whatever she wanted to and she didn’t care if dumb people didn’t like her because people who hated nice people were dumb anyway and she didn’t need dumb friends.”

“Oh, no. She’s a rebel.”

“She’s just young enough to stand with the person she thinks the world of. She’s not going to be persuaded that you aren’t the most awesome person.”

“She hasn’t even spent that much time with me.”

“Doesn’t matter. She’s a stubborn force to be reckoned with. I’m sure this will cause my parents problems. I tried to redirect the conversation for the rest of the week. My parents never brought it up again. It’s a lot to deal with. Moving again so soon would be hard financially. I just don’t know. I’m not ashamed to be gay, but it’s hard to know that something about me is causing my family problems.”

“I do understand how that feels. You were there with Finn getting frustrated about the way I dress. My gayness is affecting his birthday party. I think as bad as it is – I feel like if I back down that it will just stay bad for longer. Maybe I’m wrong. I don’t purport to have all of the answers, but I love you and I’m sorry that your family is facing this just like I’m sorry that mine faces it, but we didn’t actually make those people fill their hearts with hate. I try to remember that. Like Dave’s mom. She’s going to lose him one day because of her hate. And we lose people when hate-filled people kill gay people or they attack gay people until they give up and kill themselves. It’s hard to be strong all the time, but we can be there for each other.”

“I know. It’s a heavy burden. It’s honestly all just so ridiculous. People fight and kill each other over the right way to interpret a book. Obviously, it’s harder than it seems since people have been fighting about this kind of thing for thousands of years. Anyway, by the end of the week, Stevie and Stacey managed to get the information out of me about how I got hurt because I wasn’t going to lie to them. I told them a very basic version – I got beat up because I’m gay. That sent Stacey into a rampage if that’s even something a kid that young can have. She was angry beyond words. Stevie just looked like he was going to be sick. There’s nothing I can really do about any of it. Now I’m drowning in self-doubt. Should I have just lied and said you weren’t gay? Should I have lied and told her that I got hurt playing a sport? I don’t think so, but it’s just all jumbled I my mind. I love you and I don’t want to do anything that hurts you or leads to you getting hurt just like you don’t want me to get hurt. I’m just going to stop talking for now because there are no words to express anything else. We’re both tired and we have school tomorrow and you have a long day of work after that.”

Sam and Kurt were among the first to arrive for US Government. They took the table in the back row on the left when facing the front of the room. Sam slid into the chair farthest from the aisle. This allowed him to hold Kurt’s hand during class without keeping Kurt from being able to take notes. Finn, Puck, Mike, Rachel, Quinn, Mercedes, Santana, and Brittany were in their section as well. Kurt noticed that the rest of the class seemed to be made up of Cheerios, members of the A/V Club, and the Debate Team. No jocks that weren’t in the Glee Club. He’d have to thank Miss Pillsbury for her obviously hand-selected class members.
Their teacher arrived and he was one of the new teachers that had been hired named Mr. Sanchez. He handed out their textbooks. He explained the rules of the class. Each student had to take notes each day and once every other week, on Fridays, the notebooks would be graded. They were to keep the answers to the end-of-chapter questions in the correct place in the notebook, so that it would be organized for them to use to study for their tests.

He briefly told what made him so interested in history and government. The last thing he did was to hand out a pre-test. He told them it was not for a letter grade, but they would receive 10 points for completing it as much of it as they could. It was mostly multiple choice, but it had two essay questions at the end. One asking about the students personal opinion on the efficacy and role of the government and a second question giving the students the opportunity to introduce themselves by listing some of their hobbies and pastimes, favorite books and authors, and preferred style of music.

Kurt and Sam finished their pre-tests around the same time, but Sam did not answer the essay questions. They stayed in their places until the bell rang and everyone left. Once everyone was gone, they approached the teacher’s desk.

Sam asked, “Mr. Sanchez, do you have time to talk right now?”

“I’m sorry, but I have to stand in the hallway during the passing period. I have a planning period after that. If you can wait, we can talk then.”

Kurt nodded.

At the end of the passing period, Mr. Sanchez came back into the room. “What can I do for the two of you?”

“My name is Kurt Hummel.”

“I’m Sam Evans.”

“Ah, yes. I got a letter that you two would be in my class. I see that your hand is in a splint and I noticed you not taking notes.”

“I can’t write still. So, I can verbally give you my answers to those last two questions if you’d like or I can have Kurt write them out in a few minutes. I’m concerned about the notebook requirement.”

“You will be exempted from that, but you will still need to turn in the questions and answers at the end of each chapter. You may have Kurt type out your answers and put them in a binder to turn in every other Friday.”

“Thank you.”

“Is this likely to persist?”

“I don’t know. I was injured in early June. I’ve had surgery and I’ve been going to therapy once a week, but it’s been increased to once a week physical therapy and once a week occupational therapy now. I went to the orthopedist yesterday and I have another follow-up in a month. I might have to have surgery again.”

“That’s too bad. I’m sorry to hear that. If your injury continues, your exemption from the notebook requirement will continue. I can’t require a person to do something that they cannot do. Will you have access to Kurt’s notes?”

“Yes, I live with his family. Finn is his stepbrother. I thought you might want to know that since
“Thank you. So, you’ll have easy access to both Kurt and Finn’s notes, I think you should be fine. As for the answers to your essay questions, just dictate them to Kurt and bring them to class on Thursday.”

“I can do that. Thank you.”

“Do you have this period free?”

“Actually we’re enrolled at OSU Lima for the rest of our courses, besides Glee.”

“Glee?”

“Show choir,” Kurt offered.

“Okay. I will need to work on making arrangements for you to have a scribe for the essay portions of your tests. A scribe that is not in this course.”

“I’m not sure when they have free periods, but I’m sure that Artie or Tina would do it for me. They’re both juniors. I’ll make an appointment to talk to Miss Pillsbury maybe tomorrow if she’s available. I have to get to the OSU campus for some appointments and Kurt has to get to work. We can talk again Thursday if that’s okay.”

“It’s fine, Sam. It was nice meeting both of you. Good luck with your classes at OSU.”

“Thanks,” Kurt said.

They left McKinley and Sam drove Kurt to the shop and dropped him off.

“Don’t forget to put that parking hang tag up. I don’t want my baby towed.”

Sam laughed at him. “I will make sure your baby doesn’t get towed.” He leaned over the console and kissed Kurt. “I’ll be back for you tonight.”

Kurt walked over to the alcove by the bathroom to check out how it looked. “That’s an interesting idea. You taped to the inside of the trim and side wall. And you taped across the top at the same height as the top of the door frame and an equal distance at the bottom as the top.”

“Well, I figured we wouldn’t try to put anything that close to the edges and it was actually a lot easier than trying having to use a brush around the ceiling and the trim.”

“It looks good that way. And you’re right, we’d never hang anything that high or low. The overwhelming black is a lot to take in though.”

“Well, I need to put 2-3 more coats of the magnetic paint on and then we can paint over it with a single coat of regular wall paint and it will still work. So, you can pick some contrasting or coordinating color for the last layer or if there’s leftover paint for this room somewhere, we can just paint it back the color that it was.”

“We’ll get paint sample cards and decide this weekend since you have to do so many more coats of the magnetic paint.”

Sam walked around the bed and sat down on his side and patted Kurt’s side of the bed.
down next to him and took his hand and interlaced their fingers.

“I got the super strong magnets. One idea I had was to super glue pennies to them. Another one was that we could buy one of those jars of vintage buttons we’ve seen in some of the shops and we could super glue some of those to the magnets.”

“Oh, I love that idea – the buttons. I always see those amazing old buttons, but I never have anything that I can use just one button on. But that would be perfect.” Kurt ran his thumb over the top of Sam’s thumb. “What did you find out?”

“Well, one interesting thing for you is that you could get paid to take notes. Yours are always really good. I will get a note taker for my lectures. The person might either be hired specifically to take notes for the class or it could be someone in the course already. I’ll get them emailed to me within an hour of the end of each class. For the essay portion of exams, I can choose to do them orally or have a scribe and dictate my answers to the scribe, and then turn in the written answers. For English classes, she suggested the scribe because you have to get your thoughts more organized. Anyway, that’s all going to be fine I think. The pottery instructor said it was up to me. She said this is the lowest level pottery class and that from what I showed her, I already know how to do what will be taught, but I’m free to stay in the class. She said grading is based on following instructions and learning the techniques more than it is on the outcome. I’m going to go ahead and give it a try.”

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“Okay.”

“But my best news of all…” Sam got up and pulled something out of his bag and put it on his index finger. It was white and curved and a sort of figure 8 shape to it.” The occupational therapist made me a paintbrush prop. I can slip these rubber stoppers on the paintbrush. Let me show you.” He slipped a rubber stopper onto a paintbrush, then slipped into the plastic piece, and then put another stopper on the paintbrush. “See? Now, I can’t drop it. I have different sized stoppers for the larger brushes. I think it will really help. I tried it out during therapy, just painting with water on a piece of paper.”

“That’s a really cool invention.”

“It is. He also told me to get a Y pencil and try it out. I stopped and bought one. I can’t write neatly, but I can at least write something. I tried the Handwriting without Tears. It seems okay. I hope it works. I’d love to have better handwriting.” Sam put the stuff down on their table, turned the lights off, and got back in bed with Kurt. “Flair tip pens were also suggested because they require virtually no pressure to write with them. I’ll look for some because I could only find the Y pencil at CVS and the Flair tips were super expensive there.”

Kurt moved his arm, giving Sam to put his head on his chest and snuggle up on him. “I’m glad your therapist is being so helpful. Is it okay if we just go to sleep now? I’m so tired.”

“Of course.” Sam tipped his chin up. “Kiss me?”

“Always.” Kurt tilted his chin down and met Sam’s lips for a gentle kiss. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

After asking around, Kurt found Quinn with the skanks smoking under the bleachers before school Wednesday morning. He managed to get her to come with him and she followed him up into the bleachers. He texted Sam to tell him where he was and that he had found her.
“Quinn, what happened? Please tell me that you didn’t take up smoking over the summer.”

“So what if I did?”

“You have a beautiful voice. Smoking will ruin it. And you can’t just get rid of lung cancer. Please quit. I'll even help you if you'll let me.”

“Why do you care?”

“Quinn, what happened to the female empowerment attitude and I’m getting out of this cow town talk we had?”

“I saw her.”

“Saw who?”

“That weekend after Finn and I broke up and he went out of town for the summer. I was in the park, just sitting there. Her mom walked up and sat down next to me on the bench and pulled the stroller up facing the bench. It was Beth. I know I haven’t seen her since the day she was born. But I discreetly oohed and ahhed and got her mom to tell me how old she was. She told me her birthday. It was her. She was beautiful and perfect. I had to be with her. I gave Iris, the mom, my name and phone number and told her that I’d love to babysit any time she needed someone. She gave me her email address and said she’d need at least one reference. I got Terri’s crazy sister to write one for me. I started babysitting her once week or so, sometimes twice. It was perfect. She was perfect. A month ago, Jason, the dad, got transferred out of state. They moved two weeks ago to Colorado. Colorado. She’s gone. It broke me. I’m broken.”

“Oh, Quinn.” Kurt wrapped his arm around her shoulder, which she shockingly didn’t shrug off.

“You need to talk to someone. Ask Miss Pillsbury for a recommendation or I will, or I can help you find someone somehow. Seeing her and getting to be with her and then having that just ripped away would break anyone. I know you agreed to a closed adoption, but your regretting that now aren’t you?”

“I am. But I’m not. I’m just broken, Kurt.”

“Are Iris and Jason good parents?”

“Yes.”

“Then that’s what you have to remember. She has a mom and dad who love her. And you have your whole life ahead of you. Where are you applying to college?”

“I don’t know.”

“Will you do something for me? I have this whole booklet for a seminar that I had at Dalton. If I let you borrow it, will you do it?”

“Is it about college?”

“Mostly. It tells about how to apply, but it’s more about choosing and finding a career path that interests you after you take some free assessments about strengths and weaknesses and stuff like that.”

“Sure. I don’t want to stay in Lima. I’m just in a rut. The skanks don’t judge.”
“I’m not judging you, Quinn. Please come back to Glee. We generally suck as a family, but you won’t get lung cancer hanging out with us.”

She rolled her eyes and leaned into him. “Fine. But I’m leaving my hair pink.”

“I actually like it. I like the ‘Don’t fuck with me’ vibe you’ve got going on. You can keep the jocks at bay while you figure out what to do with your life.”

“That’s true. I almost got a tattoo, but I don’t have a fake ID and the guy at the shop carded me and sent me away.”

“Well, that’s good. I’m not against a tattoo, but getting one when you’re upset doesn’t seem like the best time to do it.”

“Probably not.”

He took his arm off her shoulder and offered her his hand, which she took. They walked back into the building and to the choir room. Mr. Schue had everyone seated the way they had been on Monday. Kurt pushed a chair next to Sam and pushed another one next to it. He sat down next to Sam and pulled Quinn in next to him. Mr. Schue gave him an unusual look, but handed them both a copy of the sheet music and kept going with the lesson. Mr. Schue kept Kurt back after class.

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“I’m going to let this morning’s tardiness go, but don’t make a habit of it. That’s the required verbal warning. What I really want to say is thanks for bringing Quinn back. She told me that she was withdrawing.”

“I got her to reconsider.”

He nodded. Kurt walked out the door. As soon as he exited, Rachel rushed in. Kurt hung around outside the door eavesdropping.

“Mr. Schue, you cannot allow her to stay. She will kill our chances at winning anything this year.”

“Rachel, you know that even when this was a club, anyone could join. Now that it’s a class, I can’t kick her out any more than I can kick out one of my US History students. Teachers have no control over who can enroll in a class. This class has no prerequisites. I’d suggest that you go align your schedule to match her free period and that you offer to work with her since she’s new. Teach her to sing. Or at least teach her to do what she’s doing much more quietly.”

Kurt moved away from the door before Rachel came stomping out. Sam walked up.

“Ready to go?” He grabbed Kurt’s hand.

“I am. How did meeting with the swim coach go?”

“She said I can join the synchronized swimming team if I’m not fast enough to be on the regular swim team. Synchronized swimming might be fun, but I don’t know when they practice. I’m not even sure if they compete or if they just do it for fun. She didn’t say. I’ll go the call out meeting tomorrow and see what happens. Let’s get you to work and me back home to paint. You can drop me off.”

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At 7:00, everyone gathered in the dining room for Finn’s birthday dinner. Rather than going out, he asked for his favorite foods to be served and to not be required to eat any vegetables. Carole laughed and gave in to his request, so for dinner they were having homemade macaroni and cheese with ham in it, shredded BBQ pork, potatoes au gratin, and baked beans. He acquiesced to Kurt’s request of making coleslaw since it went along with the meal, so long as he didn’t have to eat it if he didn’t want to.

They passed the dishes around and everyone took what they wanted.

“Will you try one bite of the coleslaw? I only want to know if you like it. I got the recipe from Nick’s mom. I really like it. It’s okay if you don’t.”

“Sure.” He took a bite. “It’s not bad for coleslaw. I like that sour coleslaw or whatever it was called from that place in Zanesville better, but this is better than the regular coleslaw.”

“So, you’d eat it again if I made it?”

“As my vegetable for the meal, yeah.”

“Thanks. What do you think of the new school schedule?”

“It’s okay. It’s kind of weird, but I like not having so many classes in one day I think. I don’t have to switch gears so many times in a row. I think keeping track of the assignments might be hard.”

“You should get an agenda like the ones we got at the OSU bookstore. I bet they have similar ones at Office Depot or something. They have a month view and then a weekly view and a daily view. So, you can keep track of things however works best for you.”

“You can show it to me later and I’ll see what I think. Since it’s finally officially my birthday, I want to thank you again for my most amazingly awesome birthday present. The truck is perfect. Oh, I haven’t figured out how to pay the school back for the tires. Can you help me figure it out, Mom? I have football after school every day and it’s a really long drive. No one would be there by the time I got there. There has to be some way to mail it, right?”

“Yeah, Finn. There is. I’ll call the school tomorrow since I’m off.”

“Thanks.”

Once everyone was done eating, everyone but Finn helped clean up. He went ahead downstairs and set up the movie. Everyone came down a few minutes later and they watched *Rango*.

When it was over, Finn said, “You were right. That was funnier than I had expected. I’m ready for my dessert now.” He jumped up and took the stairs two at a time. He was sitting at the kitchen island waiting when the others got upstairs.

He had requested brownie banana splits for his birthday, rather than a cake, since Carole had ordered a sheet cake for his sleepover on Friday. Sam had managed to make the brownies that afternoon. Finn lined three of them in the banana split bowls. He put a scoop of each ice cream on top – one chocolate, one strawberry, and one vanilla. Two banana halves lined the sides. He poured hot fudge over the top and sprinkled crushed nuts over the top.

“Perfect!” he declared with a huge smile on his face. He paused only long enough for everyone to sing to him and then he took a huge bite and stuck it in his mouth.

Kurt made a banana split with one brownie that he cut into small pieces, and he and Sam split it. Burt
and Carole did the same thing.

“I know Sam has a swim team meeting early in the morning. You three can run along to bed. Burt and I will clean this up.”

“Thanks, Mom. It was awesome. All of it. And thanks to Burt for the awesome truck. Oh, and the brownies rocked, Sam.”

Once they were upstairs, Kurt and Sam went in their room and grabbed their gifts and took them to Finn’s room. They knocked and waited. Finn opened the door and let them in.

“Hey, I wasn’t expecting anything else. You like made my truck run perfectly. It’s awesome. Totally awesome.”

“Just open mine first,” Kurt said. He reached back to make sure the door to the room was locked.

Finn unwrapped the book and turned it over. “She Comes First?” He opened it and slammed it back shut quickly. “Oh, my God, Kurt. This book is like X-rated.”

“Finn, you’re 18. You’re allowed to own X-rated stuff.”

“Well, that will take some getting used to.”

Sam said, “Open mine.”

Finn pulled it toward him on the bed and undid the tape on the brown paper grocery sack.

“I didn’t want to waste a ton of wrapping paper.”

“It’s fine. I don’t care about the paper. It’s just to keep the present a surprise.” He pulled out a small portable hanging file. He opened it up and looked inside and found the source of the rattling – a small lock. “Thanks. I’ll need this to store that book in.”

“Exactly why I bought it. It’s not indestructible or anything, but it will keep nosy people from seeing what’s inside.”

“Um, thanks for the book, Kurt.”

“You do remember me telling you that for your birthday I was going to solve your problem of not knowing how to please girls without actually having penetrative sex, right?”

“Not really, but I’ll read it when I’m by myself.”

“Good idea. I didn’t read it myself, but it had good reviews.”

Finn laughed. “Yeah, I can’t imagine it would be very… interesting for you.”

Sam said, “Yeah, not at all. Whenever you get to that point with your next girlfriend, you can let her read it and tell you which things she finds the most ‘interesting’ as you just said.”

“Um, I might die of embarrassment to show this to a girl.”

“That’s probably a pretty good sign that you’re not ready to do what’s in that book with a girl then,” Kurt said.

“Not yet, anyway. Maybe after I read it, I’ll feel more confident. Being with Rachel and Santana and
Quinn didn’t really leave me feeling all that positive about myself.”

Kurt said, “I can see how that would be. But you’re going to look into doing something outside school, right?”

“Oh, you weren’t here last night. I got a weekend job coaching a 10-11 year old flag football. And when football is over, I’ll coach one of the Saturday basketball teams.”

“That’s great,” Kurt said. “Congratulations.”

“Thanks. I’m still going to go down to the shop starting next week and see what I think about working there. I know Burt doesn’t have any openings for unqualified workers right now, but I’m hoping to just watch and see if it looks like something I’d be interested in spending a lot of time learning.”

“Sounds like a good plan.”

“Yeah, if I don’t think I’ll like it, I’m going to see if I can get on at the Y in the afternoons once football ends.”

Sam said, “I have to get some sleep. I might need to be able to show off my smooth moves in the pool tomorrow morning before school. I haven’t really been swimming in ages, so I doubt I’m anywhere good enough, but we’ll see.”

“Thanks again for the, uh, interesting present and storage box for it.”

Kurt laughed, “You’re welcome.”

“Happy birthday, dude.”

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Right after they stepped inside the bedroom door and Kurt shut and locked it, Sam said, “Oh, crap. I didn’t tell you my answers for that Government thing. I have to turn that in tomorrow morning.”

Kurt opened his laptop and turned it on. He got undressed and put his clothes in the hamper while he waited for it to be ready. He sat down in his underwear and put his fingers on the keys. “Dictate,” he said teasingly.

“That just sounds not like a word to use at school.”

Kurt laughed. “Just tell me what to write and get undressed. It doesn’t have to be amazing. It was just a ‘get to know my new students’ activity.

Sam undressed and came up with something to say for both questions. Kurt typed as he talked. Once Sam was done, Kurt got up and walked directly into the bathroom. Sam followed him.

When they came back out, Kurt did his moisturizing while Sam took the laptop downstairs to print the page out. When he came back up, Kurt was in bed. Sam put the paper in the binder he had gotten and put it in his messenger bag. He got into bed and snuggled up on Kurt.

“You know you’re the most awesome boyfriend in the whole world.”

“You know you’re the most awesome boyfriend in the whole world.”

“Thank you. So are you. The wall is looking great. Tomorrow morning, we can look around for a jar of old buttons and come home and make some cool magnets before I go to work at noon. It’s another 8-hour day tomorrow, but I want to do something fun with you too.”
“I’ll do the third coat of magnetic paint tomorrow. We should be able to put the final color over the top Friday morning before we leave. That way the smell will dissipate while we’re gone Friday and Saturday.”

“Good plan. Turn your brain off and sleep.”

“As if you have any idea how to do that.”

“Actually I do, but I think we exhausted that method in the shower.”

Sam laughed. “Kissing. Lots of kissing. That will make me quit thinking at least. Well, it will make me stop thinking about painting the wall and the other things on my to do list.”

Kurt gently pushed Sam back toward his side of the bed and rolled over to face him and kissed him passionately.

“Mmm. Just like this.”
Kurt went with Sam to the swim team call out meeting Thursday morning. They sat in the bleachers and waited for the meeting to start. Sam scooted closer and slipped his hand between Kurt’s arm and his side and slid it down until he could reach Kurt’s hand and interlaced their fingers.

“I’m excited about tomorrow. Did you get those chapter questions done so we can turn them in today?” Sam asked.

“I forgot about that. I’ve been working so much this week. At least next week, I’ll only be working 15 hours. But our OSU classes will be starting. I’m nervous about how much homework we’ll have for those.”

“Me too. I printed my answers out last night when I printed out the pretest essay answers. Mine are already in my binder.”

A whistle got everyone’s attention. “Listen up! I’m Roz Washington and I’m the new swim coach. Today’s our first meeting of the year. I want to give everyone some information, and then those of you interested in joining the team can go change and get in the pool. First off, you’ll call me ‘Coach Roz’. Secondly, anyone who wants to be on the team can be, but only the fastest swimmers in each style will compete. Those of you who end up not being fast enough to compete by late October can switch to swimming with the synchronized swimming team that I will be starting this year. Synchronized swimming is not a competitive sport, but we will still participate in events. The official start date for practices is October 28. That’s when you’ll find out whether you’re going to be able to compete. Official practices will start that following Monday for thirty minutes before school every morning starting 45 minutes before first period, giving you enough time to shower afterwards. Until then, we’ll meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays for free swim. Mondays and Wednesdays, those of you who are considering joining the synchronized swimming team can come and learn what that will involve. Uniforms will be given out the first week in November. Until then, girls should wear a simple racer-back one-piece suit and boys should wear Speedos that fit appropriately. Everyone needs their butt cheeks to be covered by their suits – that’s a state rule. That means no high-cut legs. Everyone still interested, go change and get in the pool.”

Kurt turned to look at Sam. Sam surprised him by kissing him quickly and getting up. “Are you going to stay and watch?”

“Of course. I’ll probably work on those government questions too. I’m going to go grab my book and notebook while you change.”

Kurt returned to the pool with what he needed and worked on completing as many of the questions as he could, glancing up every now and then to watch Sam. When practice ended, Kurt kept working until Sam came back out to the bleachers. Sam sat down and when Kurt looked up, he kissed him again.

“Is this what I should expect? Being kissed in public?”

“If you don’t want me to, you know I’ll stop.”

“I actually think I quite like it. But just this kind of kiss. Beyond that, I would feel weird because I don’t like seeing other people make out.”
“Got it. Are you ready to go to class?”

“Yep.”

“I’m going to need to go shopping before Monday. The baggy knee-length board shorts I brought are obviously not what the coach wants. I have to go buy a Speedo suit.”

“Mmm. That sounds like fun.” Kurt winked at him.

Sam took Kurt’s hand and they went to class. Afterwards, they stayed back and Kurt finished the last of the questions while Mr. Sanchez stood in the hall after class. When he came back in, Kurt and Sam gave him their notebooks. He looked confused.

“Sam and I are going to Kent State tomorrow for an official visit.”

“Oh, okay. Thank you for turning these in ahead of time.”

“Do you know anything about me personally?” Kurt asked.

“No. I was informed of Sam’s 504 Plan by Miss Pillsbury as required by law. I knew that on top of his dyslexia, he had an injury that would require additional accommodations. Is there something you want to tell me?”

“The students in this class are here for a reason.” Kurt explained what had happened the previous school years including the death threat, but did not give Dave’s name. He explained that his return to the school was what caused the big shake up and staff turnover along with the recent policy changes. Kurt pointed out that Miss Pillsbury had obviously personally chosen their classmates.

When he finished, Sam explained what had happened the week after school got out and the extent of his injuries.

“Well, I’m glad the school changed their policies. I will be on the lookout for guys in letterman jackets and how they behave in the hallways. I know you said the top offenders are gone, but on the off chance that some of their minions attempt to fill the void in their absence.”

“I appreciate that. Next week we won’t be able to stick around after class as often since our OSU classes start next week. I’m not sure how the exams will work for me. I guess we’ll need to meet with Miss P to figure that out.” Sam headed toward the door.

“I’m sure we can figure something out.”

Kurt stopped, causing Sam to stop as well.

“I have just one last request. If this class has any type of paired activities, I want to be paired with Sam. I am obviously aware of his issues and I’m willing to help him prepare his half of whatever the assignment is, whereas other students may not be so willing to work with him.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. Since you sit together, I may very well just assign the people who sit together as partners. Less commotion anyway.”

“Thank you. We’ll see you on Tuesday, Mr. Sanchez,” Kurt said.

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“So, making out, then lunch? Or lunch, then making out?” Kurt asked, as he pulled into the driveway.
“Hmm.” Sam teased back, “Making out, then lunch, then making out.”

Kurt laughed. “As you wish.”

“Ooh. Really?”

“Mmm hmm.”

“Awesome.

Kurt left for work a little before noon. Sam got busy putting the final coat of magnetic paint on the wall. Once he finished, he went out to the mall to search for a swimsuit. He also stopped at Kurt’s favorite vintage store and bought a small jar of buttons that he had seen Kurt looking at before. His last stop was Sam’s Club to buy food for their trip. They budgeted for going out to dinner and opted to make the rest of their food and take it with them.

Sam got home before Kurt and started to work on prepping their food for the trip. Everything took longer because of his hand, but he still eventually got everything done. Carole helped him peel the eggs when she came in to start dinner.

“He’s coming home at 6:00,” Sam said.

“Good. He works too much.”

“He’s trying to save up for college.”

“I know, but Burt is going to help him.”

“It’s a lot more expensive than it used to be, according to what Kurt said. You might be shocked when you look at the cost.”

“Finn still says that he doesn’t think he wants to go, but he’s going to apply a few places in case he changes his mind by next spring.” She looked at what Sam was doing. “You’re making that spicy egg salad, aren’t you?”

“I am. We decided we’d eat out for dinner tomorrow night, but the rest of our meals we’re packing. I haven’t made it in a long time because of my hand, but I used my left hand to cut up the onions and pepper. I just went very slowly.”

She nodded. “How was therapy this afternoon?”

“It was fine. I just have to keep on keeping on I guess.” Sam took the peeled eggs and put them in the food processor. He dumped them into a bowl and mixed everything together, put the lid on, and put it in the refrigerator. “Done.” He rinsed everything and loaded the dishwasher. “Thanks for your help. Don’t let Finn grab any of our stuff when he comes home from practice and raids the refrigerator.”

She laughed. “I won’t.”

Sam went up to their room to start packing.

Friday morning, they left at 7:30, drove to Findlay to pick up Nick and Jeff, and they drove to Kent.
They got there at 10:30. They split up to visit the departments they were interested in and met back up for lunch like they had done on their other campus visits. Nick and Jeff didn’t want to go to the trouble of packing food, so they met up at one of the restaurants near campus.

They ordered at the counter, took their numbers, and sat down. It didn’t take long for their food to be brought out and they all started to eat and talk.

“So?” Sam asked.

“I liked the architecture department a lot,” Nick said.

“The musical theatre program looks good too,” Kurt said.

Sam said, “The art department is nice, but we haven’t visited a school with a bad one yet.”

“Yeah, I think that’s what makes this hard,” Jeff said. “From a high school perspective all of the schools look good. But it’s hard to tell the difference between good and great because we don’t have enough experience to know the difference yet.”

Kurt said, “I think that is also part of the point. We can learn to do what we want to do at most of the places we’ve been to. I think what we get out of it is going to be based more on what we put into it than high school was. High school gives us no free time when we’re at school, except lunch. We have super limited choices of electives and we sit on our butts in chairs and listen to teachers tell us what they think we need to know. But what we’ve seen on our campus visits is that there are tons of electives and all of the schools bring in outside speakers for events. There are clubs, activities, plays, and movie nights. College seems to designed for us to participate and find our place.”

“I think Kurt’s right. I think that some schools would be a terrible fit for some of us. Like a school that offered no musical theatre or arts and offered only science and math would be a bad fit for all of us, but even though Dalton has a lot more extra-curricular choices than McKinley does, the teachers keep us so loaded down with schoolwork that we can only feasibly participate in a few of them. But college classes don’t meet as often. I know they have more work, but even if we have two-three hours of work per hour of class time, that makes 45 hours a week of course-related work. If we plan carefully, we should have time to join clubs and meet people. I think that most of the places we’ve been to would be fine. I think that maybe it’s not going to be like a giant epiphany of ‘This is it! This is the school I HAVE to go to!’ For some people I think it probably happens that way, but for the rest, I think it’s just a matter of picking a group of places that seem good and applying, and then waiting to see whether we get in.”

Sam said, “I get what Nick is saying. All of the art programs had pieces on display that were very good. That means that talented people attend all of the schools we’ve visited. And they work on improving their skills in the classes. I think maybe the only reason one school would appeal over another one is if there was a particular professor who teaches something very specific that someone wants to learn. I know this might sound silly, but it’s just what popped into my head. Painting on grains of rice – I’ve seen videos of it. It’s super cool. If I wanted to learn to do that, I could find a school that had a professor that taught that specifically. But if I just want to learn to paint and make clay art, I don’t need someone so specialized. From what I’ve seen, that happens in graduate school.”

Jeff said, “I think Sam’s right. I think college is sort of like what high school was 30 years ago. People graduated from high school and they could get good jobs. Now, you have to get college for that. Back then, people who went to college could get really good jobs. Now, I think you have to go to graduate school or just get really lucky to get a really good job straight out of college. High school is like the bare minimum now.”
They continued to eat and talk. Once they finished, they met up with the tour guide that had been assigned to take them on a tour of the campus. The tour ended at the campus bookstore. They thanked their guide before looking around in the store for a bit before they left.

Saturday morning, the four of them headed out to the activity areas that had been set up for the incoming students that were moving into the dorms over the weekend. They talked to people and joined in the games and won drinks and snacks and Kent State swag like ink pens, and temporary tattoos. They spent an hour doing the scavenger hunt and learned a lot of things about the campus that they hadn’t learned on the tour the day before. When they turned in their finished sheets, they got certificates for a free ice cream cone at local ice cream shop and a t-shirt.

They looked up the location of the ice cream place and went there on their way out of town when they left around 3:00. Kurt wanted to stop at a couple of places on the way back to Lima and Nick and Jeff wanted to be back around 7:00 because they were moving into their room at Dalton the next morning.

Sunday morning, Kurt and Sam lay in bed awake, but not moving from their comfortable cuddle position. Sam ran his hand up and down Kurt’s arms, gently caressing his skin with his fingers. He intermittently changed the amount of pressure, which caused him to tickle Kurt a little some of the time, just enough to cause him to barely giggle or squirm, but Kurt enjoyed it far too much to wriggle out of Sam’s reach. He stayed with his head on Sam’s chest and ran his fingers along Sam’s ribs every now and then.

“You awake enough to talk?”

“Sure, but I’m just enjoying being snuggled up.”

“Me too.”

“We have the rest of the banana bread up here. I say we take a quick bathroom break, eat the banana bread, and get back in bed for another hour.

“Okay.”

Ten minutes later, they were back in bed snuggled up.

“Better?” Kurt asked.

“Much. No more pressure on my bladder and no more growling stomach,” Sam said. “Now, I just need my snuggles. Scoot closer.”

“I always imagined what it would be like to have a friend that actually listened when I spoke. Someone who wasn’t just trying to think of a rebuttal or how to prove their point. Someone who really just liked me for me, not because I could do something for them. Someone who enjoyed spending time with me. And it’s so much better than I had even imagined.” He tipped his head up and placed a gentle kiss on the side of Sam’s neck. “I never thought I could feel so comfortable with another person. I honestly figured I’d always be holding something back in order to have anyone willingly spend time with me. And I had really resigned myself to that. When you stayed over the first night and we got up the next morning and you wanted me to wear my utility kilt and said to skip the leggings because I had sexy legs, I was shocked, but intrigued. And everything you said and did encouraged me out of my shell more and more. And every time I tried to pull back, you’ve been
there encouraging me by telling me that you aren’t embarrassed of me. You stood up to my dad. You didn’t leave after you were hurt.” He adjusted himself a bit so he was facing Sam a little more. He ran his fingers through Sam’s hair and down his neck. He pushed up a bit and kissed him gently on the lips. “I never knew how amazing it would be. I just wanted you to know. I love you so much.”

“I’ve done my fair share of hiding who I really am from people. I did it when I came to McKinley. I had done it quite a bit at the boys’ school I went to before we came here. The boys’ school was a little less stuffy than Dalton because they had more day students than Dalton. But the boarding students were the ones who formed the close friendships because those of us who were day students didn’t live anywhere near each other and oftentimes had a significant commute, not leaving much time to get to know anyone. But when I was there, I did my best to imitate the boarding students – to not stick out. I didn’t talk about geeky things. I didn’t do any impressions. I didn’t sing. I just played football and tried to blend in. I tried to continue that when I came to McKinley, except that I put lemon juice in my hair and cut it shaggy in hopes of making myself cool. I got on the football team like I wanted to and I managed to not end up at the bottom socially. I was as close to the top of the social ladder as any new student could be when I got the position as quarterback. A Cheerio wanted to date me, and even after that, a second one offered. But I saw it from the other side. Sure I was popular. I got high fives from the other popular people. But no one knew me. Quinn rebuffed my Na’vi. Santana told me not to speak. So, I do understand what you mean. I’ve been in that position that you said you thought you’d end up in.”

“I would never tell you not to speak. I love listening to you. You have interesting ideas and perspectives I wouldn’t have thought of.”

“And you do too. And I love being with you too. Look up.” Sam tilted Kurt’s chin up a bit and looked him in the eyes. “I love you. You are perfectly you. I don’t want to change you. I just want to be with you.”

“Thank you. The same is true for me, you know.” Kurt kissed him again. “You’re my favorite person.” Kurt scooted as close as he could and wrapped his arm around Sam’s neck. He took in a long slow breath and let it out slowly. “You produce a relaxing pheromone or something. Being close to you like this makes me all relaxed.”

“I thought those were supposed to make me attractive and make you to want to have sex with me,” he teased.

“Oh, but they do. Maybe just not in the way you might think. I could never really think about those kinds of things before we started going out. I just couldn’t envision any scenario in which I would be okay with someone seeing me with my clothes off and touching me. But you changed all that. You made me feel desired and attractive and cared for. And being around you was just so comfortable. And it was shockingly quick. You ninja-ed me with your awesomeness.”

Sam laughed. “Is that so?” He moved until he could nuzzle into Kurt’s neck. And started sniffing him causing Kurt to giggle because he was tickling him. “Hmm. You smell like home.”

“Like the sheets?”

“No, like where I belong.”

“You say the sweetest things.”

“I mean it. I just feel like I belong. You say I make you feel relaxed and you can be yourself. You make me feel the same way. And like I want to kiss you and make out with you.” Sam started kissing Kurt’s neck with soft kisses interspersed with a few light licks.
Kurt laughed this time. “Is this your attempt at seducing me this morning?”

“You’re the one that brought up pheromones and you do smell incredibly sexy.”

“Is that so?” And you’re right. I suppose I did. And you make me feel the same way.”

“Mmm. Lucky me.” He focused his efforts a little more and started kissing Kurt in earnest and running his hand along Kurt’s chest. “Can I?”

“Mmm hmm. Then me.”

A half-hour later, they were still lying in the bed. Sam was tracing patterns on Kurt’s chest. “I really want to lie here all day. I already miss the summer days when we did that.”

“I know. Me too. We have to do some stuff today because we need to get more organized so that we don’t jip ourselves out of any more Snuggle Sundays due to poor planning on our part.”

“Okay. I agree to one more missed Snuggle Sunday session in exchange for making sure there are no more missed sessions. This is really important to me.”

“Me too.” Kurt kissed the top of Sam’s head. “On to the things we need to do. The wall has dried for two days. I think we can make the magnets today and get everything laid out on the table and figure out how we want to put it on the wall and then tomorrow morning I think we should be able to stick it all up before we leave for school.”

“Sounds like a plan. We need to get everything on the calendars today anyway. I think we need to make a grid of just Monday through Friday that’s split showing what we’re both doing. That way we can just glance at it and not rewrite the same thing like ‘English Class’ over and over again on the monthly calendars, leaving room to write when our assignments are due.”

“Okay. We can use the computer to make a table and print it out.”

“I think we need to streamline our lunches. Maybe on Sundays we can prep stuff. We’ll have to think about it because we won’t be at McKinley for lunch.”

“True. We can add that to the list of things to think about.”

Later that afternoon Kurt said, “Making the magnets was fun and as much as I like being organized, I am done. Done, done, done.”

“I know what you need.”

“A bl…”

Sam slipped his finger over Kurt’s lips. “Dance with me. And we can kiss.”

“Mmm. I still like my first idea,” Kurt teased.

“After we dance and kiss.”

“I agree to your terms, most happily. I just have one.” He pulled Sam’s shirt off.
“You too, then.”

Kurt nodded. “Pick some music.” He made sure the door was locked and went back to Sam and put his left hand on Sam’s shoulder and Sam’s put his right hand on Kurt’s waist. Kurt offered his hand, which Sam took and they began to dance around the room.

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A knock on the door woke both of them from their nap after exhausting themselves.

“Just a second.”

They both redressed quickly.

Kurt opened the door and let Carole in.

“Oh, my. What is all that?” She said looking at their table.

“I guess we’ve been busy and didn’t show you. Come look.” Carole walked to the alcove, following behind Kurt.

“We painted the wall so it’s magnetic. Well, Sam did most of the painting while I was at work. You have to put several coats on for it to work. I painted over the black before we left Friday morning, but we’re waiting until tomorrow to put the stuff up with the magnets we made out of vintage buttons. So, all of the stuff we’re putting up there tomorrow is laid out on the table just the way we’re putting it up, so it will go really fast when we do it tomorrow.”

“Neat idea.” She walked over to the table. “You two are going to be busy.”

“Yep. But I’ll have 42 credits when I start college in the fall and Sam will have 28. Or somewhere around that with the plan we have.”

“Why will you have so many more than he will?”

“If I get a C or better this semester in French, I get credit for the four semesters that I tested out of when I took the placement test.”

“Nice.”

“And we don’t have to pay for the credits, which is also very nice.”

“It is. Anyway, I actually came up to tell you that dinner is done,” she laughed. “Finn and Puck should be here any time. He said all of the seniors in Glee are in your Government class.”

“They are. So, are the ‘geeks’ meaning the A/V Club and Debate Club. And the rest of the class is made up of the senior Cheerios.”

“Interesting mix.”

“I figured they were hand-chosen by Miss Pillsbury to insure that no one hassled me at all.”

“Well, I like her plan.”

“Me too. I don’t think I’ve ever sat in a classroom where I didn’t get ‘drop dead’ looks from at least a few people. It’s a nice change.”
“How are things overall?”

Sam responded, “The teachers are doing what’s required of them. I haven’t heard of any fights. No slushie throwing. I haven’t seen any locker shoves. So far, so good.”

“Well, I hope it stays that way.”

“Me too,” Kurt said.

“Come on. Let’s eat. Burt’s not going to hold out without us for much longer.” She laughed and walked towards the door.

On the way back up from eating, Kurt teased Finn. “Did you show Puck the book I got you for your birthday?”

Finn face turned nearly candy apple red.

Puck saw and said, “I HAVE to see this book, dude. Come on.”

“I hate you,” Finn said.

“No you don’t,” Kurt said. “Puck will like it trust me.”

Kurt and Sam went into their room and lay down on the bed and turned the laptop on so they could search for the hoodie and the wigs they still needed. A half-hour later, Kurt had put quite a few things in the shopping cart, but they were still looking through their choices.

“We still have time. Why don’t we just leave those in the cart and we’ll look again next weekend. I want to watch a movie or something before we go to bed.”

“Alright. I was thinking maybe you could play your guitar for a while before we go to bed. I miss hearing you play.”

“Sure. Let’s go shower. And I guess we need to take our books with us tomorrow to our OSU classes. I have no idea what to expect.”

“We’ll pack them and I guess we’ll find out. Better safe than sorry, but I’m figuring tomorrow will be ‘Welcome to my class. Here is the syllabus. These are my expectations.’ And then the lecture for the first day about what we’re going to cover for the semester.”

“Makes sense. Shower?”

“Lead the way.”

“I am going under protest,” Kurt said to Burt.

“Duly noted. Get in Sam’s truck. Wait in the truck. We’ll escort you in.”

Kurt got in still grumbling. “I do not want to go to this stupid football game.”
“I think we all figured that out by now. Why are you so upset?”

“Because I’m tired and exhausted and I thought I was going to get to have a nice evening alone with you resting while watching at least one movie on the big TV downstairs. I’ve gone in an hour early and worked two hours late every evening this week because John was sick all week and my dad needed the help. I just want to go lie down and I want you to hold me and I want to watch TV while you pet me, and then we switch places and I hold you and pet you.”

“Well, I like your plan a whole lot better.”

“It’s so annoying for him to be able to just declare that we’re all going 20 minutes before we’re leaving. I’m going to bring him up to our room when we get back. I’m going to show him exactly why I was too tired to go. The minute the game ends, we’re leaving.”

“Got it.”

Burt knocked on their bedroom door.

“Come in,” Kurt called out.

Burt opened the door and came in. “What did you want to talk to me about?”

“Come around here, please.” Kurt got up and walked into the alcove.

Burt followed him. “That’s some fancy bulletin board or whatever.”

“It’s magnetic paint.”

“Okay.”

“This is what we’re doing to stay organized. I need you to realize that I’m not a child. When you ordered me to go to the game tonight, I had plans to stay home and rest. I’m tired, Dad. I didn’t even get 8 hours of sleep two nights out of the last five and I have had zero free time since 6:00 Monday morning. I got up, went to school. Then I went to OSU Lima. After that I went straight to the shop to start early and I stayed until close every evening this week, except tonight, to cover for John being out sick. I worked 33 hours this week, Dad. I went to McKinley for 10. I went to OSU for 12. I did homework every waking minute that I wasn’t one of those three places.”

“I get it. Look, I’m sorry, but it was the first game of the season.”

“Then you should have told me earlier this week that you expected me to be there. How would you feel if I waited until 20 minutes before I told you that you had to go somewhere? You wouldn’t. With us going to OSU and me working, you just can’t treat us like children that you can order around to do something at the last minute. You’re going to have to treat us like you do Carole. You wouldn’t have said, ‘It doesn’t matter what you had planned. We’re going,’ to Carole. You can’t do it to me anymore either, Dad. I will try to fit what you want into my schedule, but if I say ‘no’ when you ask at the last minute, you’re just going to have to learn to accept that.”

“I get it. You’re right.”

“I’m really tired and we’re going to sleep now. I would have already been asleep if I hadn’t gone to the game. I still have schoolwork to do this weekend. Oh, I will tell you one other thing, Sam and I are attempting to keep Sundays free. Not so we can schedule things in the empty time, but so that
there IS actual empty time. If I don’t, I’m going to burn out, Dad. These college classes are harder
than high school. This English class counts as both semesters of high school English and the same
thing for our math class. So, it’s time consuming. If I’m going to keep working all year, I need a day
off that doesn’t get scheduled with other stuff. And I need to know the Sunday before if you have
something I need to do the following week. College professors do not accept late work, period.
There is no extra credit and no do-overs. And I’m sorry I’m so aggravated and grumpy. I’m going to
sleep now. Hopefully a good night’s rest will cure me of my grumpiness.”

Burt laughed. “It’s been known to work before. I’ll tell you in advance from now on.”

“I’m not going to any more football games. The guys who still dislike me are there and so are all of
their friends. It’s not a good place for me and Sam. Finn won’t care. It’s not just because I’m gay,
Dad. You’re forgetting that the school changed all of those policies because of me. Dave has to be
nice because of me. Because you have security cameras, they lost four of their best players and they
lost Sam who was really good too. And they pretty much blame me for Sam because some of them
are just stupid enough to believe that I ‘turned’ him.”

“Fine. Get some sleep. We can talk more later, but not about the football team or games. I get it.”

“I can’t work 33 hours on five school days again. Good night, Dad.”

“Night.”

Kurt locked the door behind him and in one smooth move, he turned the light out, turned the music
on, undressed next to the bed, and slid under the covers. Sam had just sat down on the edge of his
side of the bed. Kurt heard him laugh.

“It looks like naked snuggles are in order?”

“Definitely.”

“Good choice.” Sam stood and undressed and got under the covers as well.

Monday morning, Kurt and Sam stayed in bed cuddled up until 8:00. They got dressed and went
down to prep for the cookout they were having at 1:00. Finn had invited all of the Glee members
over for the afternoon. Everyone was supposed to bring a dish to share. Kurt and Sam worked
together to make a fruit salad and an angel food cake as their contributions. They started early so
they’d be out of the kitchen by the time Carole or anyone else needed to use it.

They left and went to Michael’s to get a few things that Sam needed for his watercolor course and to
JoAnn Fabric to look for some things that Kurt needed for his Costume Design course.

After they had what they needed and were back in the Nav, Sam asked, “Is there some place we
could go that’s quiet and we can talk in private?”

“Um, sure.” Kurt pulled out of the lot and drove them to the park he had taken Sam to back in the
spring that didn’t have any playground equipment anymore. “How about here?”

“This is fine. There’s just going to be so many people at the house, that there’s no way to get any
privacy.”

Kurt nodded. “Is there something wrong?”
“Yes and no, but not really anything new. I did a lot of calculations and a lot of thinking. Even Dr. Rouer says I can go back to work after my next visit, I don’t want to. In just the one the week we’ve been at OSU, I can tell that I’m not going to have time to work if I want to do well in the classes. The studio is free after my pottery class and we’re allowed to stick around and work on our pieces. Given how slow I am at it and that I’m not able to use my hand that well still, I know I’m going to be spending extra time in there. The same is true with my watercolor pieces. I can start them in our studio time, but I’m going to have to keep working after class ends to be able to make as much progress as everyone else. On the other days, I went to the tutoring center and worked on my English and math work. You’re working too much to rely on you to help me, even though I know you want to. If I hadn’t, there would have been no way for me to get through last week with you working so much.”

“I’m so sorry, Sam. I didn’t want to do it. Dad won’t make me again. He said so. He just didn’t really get how much more busy I’m going to be. I still want to do the work with you.”

“And we can. But I can also take advantage of the help that’s available to me. I can’t always rely on you to help me. In college, there may come a time when I need help and you’re in class or you’re in a rehearsal or something. I need to learn to let other people help me. It’s embarrassing, but with the issue with my hand, I’m having to overcome my reluctance in a way that I never did when my issues were invisible. Like I said, I did a lot of calculations. If get my last check right after the next doctor’s appointment and I don’t get any more, I can make it to the end of the school year on the amount I will have in my bank account, but I won’t be able to spend any money. I’m not asking you to take up the slack and pay for everything, but I’m asking how upset will you be if we can only go out free dates and I can’t afford to buy anything.”

“What about your books and school supplies?”

“I calculated those in already. If my books are cheaper or I need fewer supplies that I budgeted for, I will have a little extra money.”

“Okay. I’m not sure what to say. What would you say if the situation was reversed? Could you in all honesty say that you wouldn’t want to buy me anything or take me anywhere or spend any money on me just because I really needed to devote my time to my school work and I needed to let my hand heal? You don’t have to answer that, but think what you’re asking me. I want to say that it’s fine because it is and I completely understand, but I can’t say that the way you’ve phrased it is fine. Maybe we can come to a cooperative solution. If I’m busy working, there are things you can do at home to make my life easier. You can pack our lunches every day. You can be the one to do our laundry. You can even do a few chores like vacuuming and maybe dusting. I don’t want tension and strife between us over a small quantity of money. If we get invited out, I don’t want to say ‘no’ every time and I don’t want you to sit while everyone else eats and say, ‘I’m not hungry.’ so that I don’t end up paying for your food. I would rather sell our tickets to Comic Con and wait to go next year, if you’re going to feel bad because I pay for our half of the hotel room and the costume pieces that we still need. I know that you’re not just trying to weasel out of paying for things. I know you’re trying to do well in school and taking four college classes with your hand in the condition it’s in wasn’t on the agenda.”

Sam didn’t say anything.

“Think about it this way. We usually only go out every other week or so, and we rarely spend more than $20. If we keep the same schedule, and I pay the $20 myself both times, I will have spent $20 extra a month. I make more than that in two hours at the shop. If you do two hours worth of things that I normally do in a two-week period and I work two extra hours, then I’ll still have the same income, I’ll do fewer chores at home, and we still get to spend the same amount of time together or
on schoolwork – because if I don’t have to come home from the shop and do laundry, I can get started on my homework right away."

“I see your point. It’s just I feel bad with you working and me not.”

“You are working twice as long as me in our classes. It takes you longer to get the assignments done. I don’t begrudge you that. I promise. I’m absolutely serious. I told you when you got hurt and said that showering was going to take longer, I told you that it didn’t matter because I still had you. I still have you and if it takes you twice as long to do something as it takes me, I won’t be aggravated with you. Can we work this out? I don’t want to give up doing things with you. I love you. I want to be able to do things with our friends. I waited so long to finally have some real friends, that I don’t want to give that up because you quit working because you need to spend time on your schoolwork, not a job.”

“I’ll think about it, okay? I’ll really consider it from your perspective.”

“Okay. Was there anything else or should I head home?”

“Home.”

Kurt backed out of the spot and once he was headed out of the lot, he reached over and took Sam’s hand.

By the time they got back to the house, about half the Glee Club had arrived. A few people were setting up a game of Charades in the living room. They made their way through to take their shopping bags up to their room. Rachel followed them.

“Can I talk to you, Kurt?”

“Sure.” Kurt reached for Sam’s bag and continued up.

When they got to the bedroom door, Kurt unlocked it with his key and opened it and let Rachel walk through.

“So, are you excited about West Side Story?”

“I’m glad that something was chosen that might actually be performable and people might actually pay to see unlike the choices the previous two years.”

“Cabaret is a lovely show.”

“Not many people who are interested in the plot of that show actually live in Lima.”

“I hadn’t thought about that aspect of it back then.”

“I figured not. You were what, 14? And offered the lead? That’s hard to turn down. I’m not faulting you for wanting to be the lead. I’m just questioning Mr. Ryerson’s and Mr. Schue’s choices. Yours is much better.”

“Thank you. I decided to take my life more seriously and to give performing for a crowd a chance. I applied to Six Flags like Blaine did. We worked together in the same show.”

“Six Flags? Isn’t that like in Chicago?”
“It is. We stayed at his mom’s brother’s place. It’s has four bedrooms and he lives alone.”

“Oh.

“I met his uncle Ashton when we got there, but we worked in the afternoons and evenings. We were there in the daytime when his uncle was at work. And then we went out to do things on the weekends a lot of the time.”

“I see. That’s why you weren’t surprised the first day of school.”

“Nope. When he found out that his dad wouldn’t pay for him to go back to Dalton, he wanted to attend McKinley in hopes of getting to go to Nationals this year and because he already knows people at McKinley. He felt like it would be an easier transition than starting completely over again for a third time. His mom looked to see which branches had openings and Lima did, so she transferred to Lima. So, now he’s at McKinley with us. It’s great! He and I are such a good match vocally. We sang together a lot over the summer, obviously.”

“So, you stayed the whole summer?”

“I did. We started the first weekend that school was out. We came back the evening before school started.”

“I see.”

She was walking around his room looking at everything. “I like the New York collage.”

“Thank you. Sam made it for me.”

“And that painting is really lovely.”

“Sam painted that for me.”

“He’s really good.”

“He is.”

“I asked around when I saw the splint on Sam’s arm. I heard what happened. Some people are just terrible.”

“That’s true.”

She stepped into the alcove. “Those are lovely tacks?”

“Magnets.”

“Oh. Interesting. They’re very pretty.”

“Thanks. They’re antique and vintage buttons. The wall is painted with magnetic paint.”

“I’ve never heard of such a thing, but the outcome is quite nice.”

“Thanks. Is that all you wanted to ask me about? My opinion on doing West Side Story?”

“Are you going to audition?”

“Of course. I’d make an excellent Tony.”
“Of course, I’m going to audition for Maria.” She handed him what Kurt had thought was a magazine in her hand. “Miss Pillsbury gave me this to give to you.”

Kurt took the brochure from her. “NYADA?”

“It’s the best Broadway training school in New York City. That’s where I’m going to apply for college. You should apply. We could get a cute two-bedroom place or I guess we could live in the dorm, if we can’t find a place.”

“Where else are you going to apply?”

“Just there. I want to attend the best school.”

“I see. I’ll take a look at the information. Thank you for bringing it to me.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Let’s get back downstairs.”

He ushered her out and she walked toward the stairs. Kurt relocked his door and followed her, only to be met on the steps halfway up by Quinn who was looking for him. He turned and went back up the stairs.

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He unlocked the door and let her in. He shut the door behind him, assuming that she wanted privacy. She walked around his room looking at everything.

“You share a room? Or is Sam’s room somewhere else?”

“We share.”

“I didn’t think your dad would go for that.”

“I’m 18 and so is Sam.”

“Ah.”

“Why did you want to see me?”

“I just wanted to thank you. Sue came after me this past week and I didn’t let her get to me. But I’m going to need something to do. I don’t want to be her poster child for how the arts hurt people. It’s stupid. I didn’t end up doing the dual enrollment, but I wish I had. I hate being at school.”

“You could try for next semester.”

“I’ll look into it.”

“You can audition for West Side Story. That would give you something to do in the afternoons until November.”

“That’s true.” Quinn looked at their calendars. “Those are beautiful magnets.”

“Vintage buttons glued to super strong magnets.”

“Nice. Glassblowing?”
“Sam’s taking it. He was taking a class this summer, but his injuries prevented him from completing it. The museum was really kind and let his tuition be applied to the class this fall instead.”

“I bet it’s really cool.”

“I think it will be.”

She opened the bag she had with her. “I brought this back. Thank you for letting me see it. McKinley should have a class like that.”

“They should. Maybe I’ll show it to Miss Pillsbury.”

“I’ve picked a couple of places to apply, and I’m going to apply to a couple of places here in Ohio as back-ups, but hopefully I’ll get in somewhere else.”

“I hope you get in wherever it is that you really want to go.”

“Thanks. I won’t keep you anymore. Oh, I almost forgot. I quit smoking. You were right. Hurting myself isn’t going to help anything. I was only smoking like one a day, so it wasn’t that bad to give it up. I’ll think about West Side Story or I’ll have to come up with something else like getting a job or joining the swim team or something.”

“Oh, you probably haven’t heard, but the new swimming coach is starting a synchronized swimming team. No competitions, but they will perform. I don’t know what that means exactly, but you could go talk to Coach Roz and find out.”

“Interesting. I’ll think about that too.” She left.

Kurt slipped his shoes off and lay back on the bed. He wasn’t feeling overly social, but he knew that he would eventually have to go downstairs and mingle. Five minutes later when his phone pinged with a “Where are you?” text from Sam, he headed back downstairs.

“I am the great sta-aa-rr!”

Coach Beiste, Miss Pillsbury, and Artie all clapped loudly and whooped and hollered. He was thrilled with their reaction. He took his sai swords and put them away carefully and changed back into his clothes to leave for the shop.

After he changed, he waited around and watched where the three directors were going and he managed to get himself situation under Miss Pillsbury’s office window to eavesdrop, only to hear Coach Beiste say that he was too much of a lady to play a believable Tony. Miss Pillsbury defended him, but it didn’t seem like she was persuasive enough. He was crushed, but he knew there was little to be done to persuade them without creating a scene. He already knew that Rachel would prefer Blaine to him.

Kurt went back the next afternoon to watch the other auditions from the upper balcony where no one could see him. Mercedes absolutely killed her audition. She was much better than Rachel had been.

He saw Blaine audition and sing “Something’s Coming”, and then Artie asked him to read for Tony and he agreed, even after he had said that it would be right for a senior to play Tony. Kurt walked out and didn’t stay to watch. He knew then that they had decided against giving Kurt a shot. Miss
Pillsbury had not been persuasive enough.

He wondered what they would do about Mercedes and Rachel.

Rachel and Mercedes had been called back and performed at lunch on Friday. Mercedes called Kurt after school on Friday and told him that she had turned down being double-cast with Rachel. She told him the whole conversation in Miss Pillsbury’s office. He encouraged her and told her that he knew that she was the best from the videos she had sent him earlier in the day. She knew what he thought because he had told her the minute he had watched both of them, but he still reminded her. He knew what she was going through. She didn’t fit the look the directors were going for and neither did he. They weren’t going to get a chance to shine.

“Can you drive?” Kurt asked Sam. “I want to go with you, but I just don’t feel like I’m in a good place to be driving that far today.”

“Sure, of course.” Sam got in the driver’s seat and headed out of town toward Toledo. He reached over and put his hand on Kurt’s leg. “What’s going on?”

“Well, I know that I told you that I was going to audition for West Side Story and Cassius helped with building an awesome metal structure that can be used for the play.”

“Yeah.”

“Well, I left work more than just Wednesday. I went back on Thursday. Blaine auditioned, and I know they’re going to cast him. I eavesdropped on the directors’ meeting. ‘I’m too much of a lady’ was the exact wording.”

“I beg to differ.” He slid his hand up Kurt’s thigh closer to his crotch.

Kurt laughed. “Thanks. But it’s their opinion that counts. Blaine said he would audition for other roles, but he sang a Tony song, and then Artie asked him to read for the part. That was the day after I auditioned, so I knew they weren’t thinking of choosing me even when I was the only one who officially signed up to audition for Tony.”

“I don’t see why everyone thinks he’s so great.”

“Please stay that way. Please don’t hang around with him. He has this ability to charm people. It worked on me for a while, and if you hadn’t come into my life, it probably would have continued to work.”

“Not a problem. I have friends already. You and Nick and Jeff. That’s good for now. And Finn’s come a long way already. So, I don’t need any new friends right now.”

“Thank you.” He paused for a minute. “Mercedes called me yesterday at work and told me that she turned down being double-cast. So, Maria is going to Rachel. Mercedes was better. But Rachel got upset and Mercedes just doesn’t want to deal with her anymore. So, I know when we go in Monday morning that it will be Blaine and Rachel cast as Tony and Maria. I know I wasn’t even going to bother trying out since I was already the lead over the summer, but I thought it would look good on my CV to get picked at school too.”

“When are they putting the cast list up?”
“Monday at lunch. I’m going in and confirming it’s Blaine that’s been chosen, and then I’m withdrawing my name if I’ve been cast as someone else. I only auditioned for Tony because I already know all of the lines and the songs. I don’t have time to learn new lines and parts. I already have too much to do for that. It’s just disappointing and aggravating. And I know that something is going on because Sugar missed class all week.”

“Well, we’re going to try to forget about all of this after my class. Or at least not think about it for a while. We have the picnic lunch I packed and we’re going back to the beach.”

“Thanks for listening.”

“Any time. It frustrates me that people continue to treat you like less than the man that you are, but you’re right about causing a lot of turmoil. We wanted this year to be smoother than last year.”

“I was thinking that maybe letting them see the video from the summer might be good.”

“That’s an interesting idea. You just need to make an appointment to see both of them at the same time. You could skip math one day and we can just use the note taker’s notes and I can record the class with a tape recorder.”

“That could work.”

Kurt went to see Miss Pillsbury while Sam went to swimming practice. He was waiting outside her door when she got there.

She was surprised to see him. “Kurt?”

“I need to talk to you before first period, if possible.”

“Sure. Come in.” She sat down behind her desk.

He closed the door before he began to speak. “I’m withdrawing from participating in West Side Story. I know you’ve chosen Blaine to be Tony and Rachel to be Maria. I’m not going to fight you on the casting. I will walk away just like Mercedes did. But you’ve made the wrong choice. Mercedes was better than Rachel and you know it. I do appreciate you sticking up for me. I just wish it had been enough.” He sat down facing her.

“How did you know?” Whenever Kurt spoke, Miss Pillsbury struggled with keeping her hands calm.

“I was eavesdropping.”

“Oh.”

“What role did you cast me in, if any?”

“Officer Krupke.” She straightened her stapler for the third time.

“How did you know?” Whenever Kurt spoke, Miss Pillsbury struggled with keeping her hands calm.

“I was eavesdropping.”

“Oh.”

“What role did you cast me in, if any?”

“Office Krupke.” She straightened her stapler for the third time.

“So, you all clapped and cheered and then gave me the role of the slow cop, who doesn’t sing or dance.” Kurt had to refocus his energy to keep control of his tongue. “I see. I’d like an appointment with you and Coach Beiste next Tuesday during second period. Either that or after school. Sam can record our math class at OSU and just tell the instructor that I had a meeting with my counselor and principal and I won’t be penalized for missing class.”

She looked at her calendar and called up to the main office. “Tuesday second period will be fine.”
“Thank you. Please change the cast list before you put it up. My official reason for withdrawing is my work schedule. I do not need rumors. I’m trying for a low drama senior year, which isn’t starting out that way.”

“I’ll put someone else in Officer Krupke’s role, and if someone asks why you weren’t cast, I will say you had a work conflict.” She forced her hands into her lap instead of reaching to restraighten something else on her desk.

“Thank you. I’ll see you next Tuesday. Here or in the main office?”

“In the main office.”

“I’ll be there.” Kurt got up, opened the door, and went to the pool.

When he got home from work that evening, Kurt sat and picked at his food through dinner. He packed it up for lunch the next day and went up to their room and sat at the table and got started on the problem set he hadn’t completed yet for the next day.

When Sam came upstairs, he closed and locked the door after he came in the room. He walked over to where Kurt was working through problems as quickly as he could. He could see the stress and strain of everything on Kurt’s face. He ran his hands along Kurt’s shoulders gently and leaned over and kissed the top of his head. Kurt looked up and gave him a genuine, if short-lived smile. Sam took the opportunity to place a kiss on his lips.

“It looks like you’re almost done. When you finish, we can take a quick shower before we go down to watch Warehouse 13.”

“Sounds good. I could use a good dose of artifact hunting tonight.”

The Lima Bean was really crowded, so Kurt went to find a table for them to study at while Sam got in line to get them drinks. They normally had class at 10:30, but they received an email earlier that morning indicating that class had been cancelled for the day. Kurt stood around for a few minutes waiting for someone to leave. He slipped into a booth as soon as the woman who had been sitting there left.

A few minutes after he sat down, a guy stood next to the table. “Mind if I join you?”

Kurt didn’t bother to look up from the textbook he was reading. “Feel free.”

They both sat in silence for a while. Kurt continued to read. His companion pulled a book out of his satchel and started to read it. Sam almost passed Kurt over when he was looking for him because there were two people in the booth. He walked over to the table, put their drinks down, and slid in next to Kurt.

“I see a member of the collective has come to join you. Is he trying to re-assimilate you?”

Kurt burst out laughing when he finally looked up and saw that his companion was wearing a Dalton uniform. The visitor nearly spit his coffee onto the table and struggled not to choke.

“Definitely from the collective, but this is a model I’ve not seen before, so I don’t think he was sent to retrieve me or attempt to re-assimilate me. Plus, his sense of humor is still intact, so his assimilation...
Once the young man regained his ability to speak, he said, “Alright, you two. Very funny. They’ve tried to assimilate me as well, but from what you’ve just said, you had the fortune of escaping their clutches, do tell.”

“I went back to public school.”

“Oh, God. That’s worse than being assimilated.”

“Perhaps.”

“Those do not appear to be public high school textbooks.”

“Oh, they aren’t. We go to OSU Lima for most of our classes.”

“May I?” he asked, as he pointed to Kurt’s French textbook.

“Sure.”

He pulled it out of the stack and opened it. Kurt went back to reading. Sam pulled out his Government textbook and started to read.

Their guest interrupted them again. “This book is entirely in French. Definitely not a beginning textbook.”

“I tested out of the first two years. That’s a third year textbook.”

“Then, you actually know some French?”

“I do, but please speak English so we can all participate in this conversation.”

“Well, that was impressive. How did you learn to speak French so well in this backwater town?”

“I learned as a child. My mother studied French and her best friend was from France. When I was little, she babysat me while my mom went to work.”

“Here in Lima?”

“Yeah.”

“Kurt?”

“How do you know my name? Wait. No way… Bas?”

“You got it.”

“Wait. You two know each other?”

“Well, we did. When we were little kids. His mother Lydia was my mom’s best friend. They moved away right before third grade started.”

“My parents got a divorce and my grandmother was sick. My mom took me and went back to France. I had to repeat second grade because of my birthdate or something. It was a good thing anyway because school was a lot different and although I spoke French well, my mom hadn’t really started teaching me to write in French. Since we were here, she wanted me to focus on learning to
read in English. Shouldn’t you have graduated last year?”

“I should have, but I repeated third grade.”

“Why?”

“You don’t know what happened after you left?”

“We were little. I missed you, but neither one of us was old enough to write letters or have much to say on the phone.”

“I guess in your mom’s position, I would have done the same. My mom was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. It wasn’t treatable. I mean they tried, but it didn’t work. She quit her job and eventually my dad pretty much just let me stay home from school all the time. I guess at some point, he just told them I was being home-schooled or something so they would leave him alone.”

“Oh, God, Kurt. I didn’t know. Maman never told me.” He reached out and put his hand over Kurt’s.

“Like I said, looking back, we were just little kids and you weren’t around anymore, so I can see why she wouldn’t have told you. There’s not much point in upsetting a young child when there’s nothing they can do about a situation.”

“Yeah, I guess. I’m still really sorry to hear that Lizzie died. She was really sweet.”

Kurt nodded, pulled his hand back from Sebastian’s, and wiped away a few tears. Once he could speak again, he asked, “Why are you back?”

“Oh, that was my father’s doing. Well, and my own, I suppose. Let’s just say that I haven’t been on my best behavior the last few years. My maman’s words. My parents decided that perhaps a year at boarding school in Podunk, Ohio might be a solution to my ‘lifestyle choices’. So, I’m spending my senior year at the illustrious Dalton Academy. You said you went last year?”

“Long story. I’ll tell you some other time. I thought your dad moved to Columbus or Cleveland or some big city after you and your mom went back to Paris.”

“He did – Columbus. But my grandfather is in a home in Lima and my father moved into his father’s place to be closer. He doesn’t have much longer.”

“Sorry to hear that.”

Sebastian nodded. “Thanks. So, now I have the grand pleasure of living in this Hicktown when I’m not at school. At least there’s a decent coffee shop. Are you ever going to introduce me to…”

“Oh, sorry. My brain fried back when I realized who you were. This is my boyfriend, Sam Evans.”

“Sebastian Smythe. Nice to meet you.” He started to offer his hand across the table, but then he noticed Sam’s hand in a splint, and put his hand back down.

“Likewise.” Sam just smiled and nodded politely.

“Why aren’t you at school, Bas?”

“Physical. I have to be properly examined by an American doctor. My appointment is at 11:00. I figured I’d study and drink coffee until I had to go. Seemed like a better idea than sitting my grandfather’s house alone. I was thinking of hitting up Scandals this weekend. Interested in joining
Kurt laughed out loud. "You’ve got to be kidding me. Wait, are you gay?"

"Well, duh."

Sam said, "Unless you’re into middle-aged bears, Scandals isn’t going to be your scene."

"It’s the only gay bar I could find within a 30-mile radius."

"You might luck out and go on line-dancing night. You took tap lessons. You’ll probably catch on quickly."

Sam was chuckling.

"Alright, fine. I get it."

"Plus, isn’t your dad a lawyer? How is sneaking into a gay bar an improvement over whatever you were up to in Paris?"

"It’s not, but God this place is boring."

"Go somewhere in Columbus. Don’t come home for the weekend. There are 18 and up clubs there. You can get in without breaking the law."

Sam spoke up, "And you'll meet guys under 35." He laughed.

"Sounding promising. Do you guys go?"

"We’ve been a couple of times when we’ve done other things in Columbus during the daytime. Otherwise, it’s a lot of driving for a couple of hours of dancing to get home at a reasonable time and it’s not worth the expense of a motel room if we aren’t doing other things too," Sam answered.

"It wouldn’t be that far from Dalton. You could go check it out. It’s probably a 30-minute drive."

Sebastian pulled his phone out. "Put your phone numbers in." Kurt took the phone and put both of their numbers in.

"So, if you two are dating openly, maybe things aren’t as bad here as I figured."

"Oh, no. They can be that bad. That’s how I ended up at Dalton last year. I’ll still tell you later. It’s not something I talk about out in the open."


Kurt laughed. "Yes, Nick and Jeff are our best friends."

"So, the illustrious Blaine Anderson is at whatever high school you go to?"

Kurt did his best to hide his reaction, but Sebastian’s question had caught him off-guard. "Yes, he is attending McKinley now."

"Nice try, but I saw your initial reaction. From the Warbler’s reaction when he came yesterday, he’s the incarnation of show choir male lead perfection."

"So, you’re a Warbler?"
“I am. I’m lead Warbler. He showed up yesterday inviting everyone to… McKinley… that’s it … to watch him in *West Side Story*."

“Sounds right,” Kurt said. “He wouldn’t want his adoring fans to miss out on his performance.”

“Not a fan, I take it.”

Sam about choked on his drink. Kurt snorted.

“No. Not a fan,” Sam said.

“I see.”

“Wait, I heard about you, too. I didn’t even consider that it was you. For one thing, I never called you by your full name, and I never expected you back in Ohio. But now that you said you’re a Warbler…”

“So, Nick and Jeff said something about me?”

Kurt didn’t answer, but raised an eyebrow.

“I see.”

Kurt laughed.

“I have to get going soon.”

“Call me and we’ll do something not in Lima.” Before Sebastian got up, Kurt spoke quietly. “Don’t assume that the No Bullying policy means that being openly gay will win you friends at Dalton.”

“Oh, terrific.”

“Does your dad know?”

“Well, I didn’t tell him. My *maman* knows, but I don’t think she’d tell my dad.”

“Well, then definitely consider the 18+ club in Columbus. It’s not specifically a gay club. It’s just LGBTQ friendly. That way if he finds out you’ve been going there, he won’t automatically assume anything you don’t want him to know.”

“I should just tell him myself. I’m 18, but I’ll have to think about it.”

“You can probably get a feel for his opinion on the topic by telling him that you ran into me and my boyfriend today.”

“That’s true.”

“Anyway, it was really good to see you. Call me and you can come over for dinner some Saturday when you’re home for the weekend. We moved less than a year ago, not that you’d remember how to get to where I lived before. But my dad remarried last fall, in November. I acquired a stepbrother our age named Finn.”

Sebastian checked his phone for the time. “I’m sorry, but I really have to run or I’ll be late to the doctor’s office’s. I’ll text you.”

Kurt and Sam waved as he walked away from the table and out the door.
“Well, that was a blast from the past,” Kurt said. “I didn’t think I’d ever see him again.”

“Trying to get Nick and Jeff to agree to a three-way,” Sam laughed. “He’s not going to have any luck with that. He’s good-looking alright, but he’s barking up the wrong tree.”

“Yeah, they said he was a good-looking charmer. From what he said, he’s not interested in dating. I’m not saying I would be a player in his position, but I probably wouldn’t be looking for anything serious if I were leaving the country in 10 months. But I guess there’s the chance that there’s another gay guy at Dalton that will be going to France for college. Who knows?”

Kurt reached under the table and took Sam’s hand. They went back to reading until they needed to leave to get to their second class.

“So, the two of you were best friends when you were little?” Sam asked after they were in the Navigator on the way to class.

“Yeah. We were together most of the time. Lydia watched me while my mom worked. Bas is just a couple of months younger than me. He’s an only child and we were like brothers. It was hard when he left. I wasn’t long after that when my mom got sick. At first, she was home after school because she was working part time and I liked that. It didn’t completely make up for missing Bas and Lydia, but I got to spend more time with my mom, which I liked. She eventually quit working. When she got worse after Christmas, my dad just quit making me go to school. I stayed home with her. She would sit in a bar chair and I stood on a stool and she taught me to cook. She taught me to make my dad’s favorite dishes and mine. She taught me how to sew and how to use her sewing machine.”

Kurt wiped the tears from his face, so he could see to drive.

Sam reached over and put his hand on Kurt’s thigh. “I’m sorry. We can talk about this some other time if you want.”

“Seeing him was amazing, but it brought back a lot of memories.”

“You never had told me why you got held back a grade. I see why.”

“Maybe now that things aren’t so bad, I can start to think about her more often. I don’t know. It’s always a toss up between trying to let it go and not wanting to forget her. I know she loved me, but there’s nothing left of her here to hold on to. So, I’m forgetting her because there’s no one to remind me. And the longer it’s been, the more the memories feel like stories I’ve told myself, which I am sure is true for the most part. Very few people remember much of what happens when they’re that young. And with my dad not talking about her, my memories are bound to be inaccurate. But I do remember the things we did right before she died because those are things that I still do. I have her sewing machine and I still use her measuring cups, measuring spoons, and mixing bowls. Sometimes thinking about it just makes me sad, but I just couldn’t when things were already so hard. I would just cry for her. It never helped. Anyway, now you know. And you know how I know French. No one at school knows.”

“I won’t say anything.”

“I know. I trust you completely.”

They rode in silence the rest of the way to the campus parking lot. Once Kurt had pulled into a spot, Sam took his hand. “I know you miss your mom. If you ever want to talk about her, it’s okay. I don’t want you to feel like you have to hide being sad or missing her from me.”
Kurt just nodded and wiped his eyes again. He leaned forward and got a napkin out of the glove box and wiped his nose. “Let’s get to class before we’re late. We can talk more later.”

Sam nodded and grabbed his messenger bag and got out. Kurt grabbed his satchel from the back seat. Sam came around the SUV and took Kurt’s hand and interlaced their fingers. They took off across the parking lot to get to their classes.

Monday was a long day. Kurt and Sam missed Glee in order to go to Toledo for Sam’s follow-up appointment. They had the first appointment of the day so that they could be back in Lima in time for their classes at OSU. They only waited a couple of minutes before Sam was called back.

Dr. Rouher came in and examined Sam’s hand. “It’s looking quite a bit better. The reports from the physical and occupational therapists are showing improvement. I don’t want to do exploratory surgery unless absolutely necessary and since you are making progress, I’m going to have you come back in six weeks, unless you stop making progress, pain starts up again, or your swelling returns.”

“What about work? There’s always the three families not wanting to pay the restitution, well the lost wages part.”

“How much are they even paying, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“It’s fine. Each family is paying $25 per week.”

“So, their sons attacked you, dumped you in a car trunk, beat you up more, and then left you in a dumpster, and they’re fighting a court order to pay you $25 a week while you still go to therapy twice a week to regain the use of your primary hand?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I’ll extend the no work release until your next visit.”

“Thank you.”

Kurt waited until Mr. Sanchez went out into the hall before he leaned toward Sam and kissed him. “I’ll see you later. It’s alright. I know you want to be there for me for the debate, but that’s just not possible. One of us has to go to class to record it. I’ll be okay. I’ll call you later this afternoon.” He kissed him once more and headed to the main office.

When he got there, he was passed through into Coach Beiste’s office. He went ahead and pulled his laptop out and got it set up. Miss Pillsbury arrived right after the bell rang. He was ready when she sat down. Kurt closed the door to the office. He asked them to sit close enough together that they could both see the screen. He had noted where to start the disc the previous night. He forwarded to the spot and pressed play.

The two of them watched. About 10 minutes later, he stopped the video and powered his computer back down. He put it back in his satchel before speaking.

“As you can clearly see, I am not too feminine to play Tony.”

Coach Beiste said, “I was wrong, Kurt. I’m sorry.”
“I was most hurt by what you said. I would have thought a woman of your stature would have endured the same type of discrimination. I would have thought that you, of all people, would have understood that type of stereotyping.”

“You’re right. I do. I don’t know what else to say except that I’m sorry.”

“You owe Mercedes the same apology. She was better than Rachel and you both know it. You didn’t want to deal with a Rachel tantrum, so you offered to split the role when you both know that it should have gone to Mercedes. She and I would have made an excellent Tony and Maria. And today I found out that Rachel somehow made Sugar quit Glee, but her dad paid for a new Glee Club to be started? This is just nuts. And now Rachel is running against me for Senior Class President. I’m over this. I’m moving on. I just wanted the two of you to see that you were wrong, well mostly Coach Beiste. I won’t go to the school board or call Mrs. Huntington, although I probably could. I just want this year to end at this point. If things don’t start to look up, I may look into my options for early graduation in December. I’ll have enough credits. I’m just tired. I don’t have the time or energy for more fighting.” He stood up and grabbed his satchel. “I have to go prepare for the debate.” He left the office without giving them time to say anything else. He stopped at the secretary’s desk and took a pass so he could go to the library for the rest of the period.

Kurt was surprised that Rachel bowed out of the race during the debate. Of course, Brittany promised things she couldn’t follow through with and Rick said nothing of any significance. After the debate, Kurt left and went to his second class of the day at OSU. Afterwards, he went to work, as usual.

When he got home from work that evening, he bowed out of dinner and went up to their bedroom to get the work done he needed to do. He had reading for his English class, math problems that he hadn’t finished yet, and French homework that had been assigned the day before that he hadn’t done yet. He didn’t have Government again until Thursday, so he moved that out of his stack of things that need to be done first.

Forty minutes later when Sam came in the room, Kurt had finished the math problems and he had started on his French assignment. Sam put a plate with a sandwich cut in quarters and baby carrots laid out between the sections next to Kurt at the table, but didn’t say anything to interrupt him.

He took the novel out they were reading for English along with Kurt’s original iPod with the audiobook version loaded onto it and lay back on the bed to listen as he followed along in the book.

Kurt ate the food and finished his French assignment. When he was done, he stacked everything up and headed for the bathroom. Sam saw him get up from the desk. He paused the book and put his bookmark in and followed Kurt to the bathroom. He undressed and got in the shower with Kurt.

“What happened today? All you texted me was ‘We’ll talk later.’ And then I haven’t heard anything else from you.”

“Rachel bowed out of the race, asking everyone to vote for me instead. Rick gave a stupid speech about how since our parents pay taxes and tax money pays the teacher salaries that the teachers should have to do what we say. He called out Mrs. Janicek for being boring and told her to shut up in class.”

“No way.”

“He did. Brittany gave a speech about the danger of tornados and how if she’s elected, she’ll ban tornados from McKinley and keep everyone safe. Oh, and that she’ll go topless every Tuesday, which of course brought on a round of applause by the guys in the bleachers.”
“Okay…”

“I gave my speech about ending dodge ball, like I had planned. My speech was not well-received, of course. Rick had his hockey supporters at the debate, which was quite poorly-attended.”

“I wish I could have been there for you.”

“It wouldn’t have changed anything. My dad came, which was nice, but it’s just stupid. I’ll never win. The election’s is in two days, so at least I won’t have long to wait. Plus, I saw who the new Glee coach is.”

“Who?”

“Ms. Corcoran.”

“No way.”

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