Time'em

by elle_delajoie

Summary

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 of Season 2. 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. The only change to Season 1 is that Shelby Corcoran did not adopt Beth.

Complete.
“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 stepbrother's basketball game, mostly. Working at the shop. 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. After he finished his shift at the shop, Kurt headed home and changed quickly.

Burt, Carole, and Kurt went up to the school to watch the game, which McKinley won. Finn went to the team party afterwards. Kurt went back home. He spent the rest of the evening doing homework, which had not managed to finish ahead of time, but he was still hoping that by Sunday he would be able to spend some time doing something enjoyable for a while, like maybe a manicure and a facial.

“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.”

“No 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 Council.”

“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.”

“Who 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. 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. 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.”

“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 LeFevre. 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 honestly, 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?”

“Noope. 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 dinertime 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.

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?”

“Yeah, 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.

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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.

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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: Exlent. 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 ptice during lunch.

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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.

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“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 kazoos?” 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?

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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.

“You don’t get it. You just don’t. 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. 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.
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.”

“Oh, 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.

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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.

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“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?”

“No 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.

“*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?”

“Oh huh.”

He kept it up.

“No hiccups 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.”

“{}o{}o{}o{}”

“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.

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“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.

“Alright. 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 its 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, sneakingly 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.

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 disinherit 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 be 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 outing him if 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 outing 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.

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“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 along 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.”

“Yep. 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 outed or potentially outed three people now. He could get someone killed.”

“Maybe I’ll just invite him for a chat to see how he’s doing.”

“Whatsoever 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 to all 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.

“I’m 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.

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“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 bad.

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.

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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 early Monday morning.”

“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.

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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 to 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 two can 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.
Chapter 6

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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 pushed 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.

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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.”

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.”

“Yeah, 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?”

“Oh, 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.”

“Why?”

_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. Schuester 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.”


“Nope.” 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 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!”

“It’s okay, Kurt. We all had a first love. Just pay attention to what you’re doing.”

“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 trying 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.”

“Allright. 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 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. 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.”

“Okay.”

“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.”

“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?”

“Oh – 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 adventurous 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.

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.

“We’ve 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 outing 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 planed 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
“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.”

“Your 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.

“Okay, 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 you’re 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 swaggled 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. You’ll probably get more kisses that way.” 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.

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.

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.

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 dumpster tossed me into 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 admit 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.”

“Santana knows. She’s blackmailing me. The Gleeks want you back at McKinley. If I step one toe out of line, she’s going to tell my mother. My mother volunteers at conversion camp every summer. My mother will stop at nothing to cure me. I can’t handle that. I’m just barely able to handle the truth about – you know. I know that the therapy doesn’t work. I read about it hoping that it would. I don’t want to be – you know. I want to be normal, but that’s not happening from everything I’ve read. I will do anything to keep my mom from finding out.”

“So, Santana knows and you’re too scared to cross her because she can be an evil bitch.”

“Exactly. 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.

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 offense. 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 superintendent’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.”

“...”

“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.”

“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 spat 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 other 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 totaled 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 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.

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“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 snuggling 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
“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.

“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.

“It’s really weird without you here. I miss you.”

“Just five weeks. And part of that time, you’ll be in New York. And I’ll be home on Friday. I’ll be there when you get home from work.”

“Rachel wasn’t in Glee today, which was really weird because she was at school. She didn’t sit with us at lunch though. I didn’t see her at lunch, actually.”

“I’ve been thinking about something that Trent pointed out to me a while back – that I look down on the guys who go to school here who just follow the path that’s been laid out in front of them.
He says that it’s just as wrong for me to dislike people just because they’re basically puppets as it is for people to dislike me because I’m gay.”

“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. Schuester 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!
“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 lots 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.”

“Alright.” 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.

“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.”

“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 getting outed 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 beingouted. 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 beingouted 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 a 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.”

“{}o{}o{}o{}

“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.”

“{}o{}o{}o{}

“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?”

*Please.* Kurt nodded. “Yes.”

“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.”

“Deal. 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.”

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

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 soo 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 ooooh ooooh ooooh ooooh ooooh

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.

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
“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 later in this presentation.
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 its 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.

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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.”

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“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 was 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:

*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*

Mercedes and Tina joined him on the stage. Tina’s shirt said SHY. She sang:

*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*

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 Skype tutoring.

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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?”

“Brad usually plays for us.”

“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 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’still nighttime.” He kissed Kurt’s shoulder. “S’still 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’still 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.

“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?”

“Yes, 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.”

“You had fun, right?”

“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.”

They ate together in silence for a few minutes.

“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 darn 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.

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“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.”

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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.”

“Oh.” Rachel got up to go into the dining room.

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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.”

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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 is 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.

“Alright. 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 wheelchair 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.

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“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 in 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.

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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 Erie. 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.”

“What 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.”

“Okay. 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 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.

“An art museum. It’s free?” 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 start 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
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 throught 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.
---
We taught the world new ways to dream.

Everyone clapped.

Sam was the first one up 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
“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.

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.”

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.

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?”

“A2-B5.”

“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.”

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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.”

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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!”
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 into 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
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.”

“Oh 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.

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.”

“How, 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’s 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 at 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 there 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.

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 never 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?”

“Not 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.

“Have 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?”

“Yes.” 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?”

“Yes.”

“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?”

“No 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?”

“Yep.”

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 Cottrill 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.”

“Okay, 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?”

“Nope.”

“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.

“Thank you for making it for me,” Kurt said.

“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.

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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.

“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.”

“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.”

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.

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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?”

“Yeah. 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 kisses 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.
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.

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.”

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 of 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.

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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.

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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.”

“Okay. 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?”

“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.”

“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 again 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 far more than they deserve. 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 torturer 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 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.

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.”

“Ohkay. 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
“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 this 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 *Green Lantern*.”

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
“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.”

“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 nana and the other half with my
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.

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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.

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.

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 Redbox 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.

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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.

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They dropped the Gnomeo and Juliet DVD off, and then headed for the highway. 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 sniffle. 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.

“Hey, guys. You’re back early. I wasn’t expecting you for dinner.”

“We can make something ourselves after while. I didn’t think to call to say we’d be back early. It’s fine,” Kurt answered.

Sam didn’t stop to chat with Carole. He just headed straight for the stairs and up to their room.

“Bad trip?”

“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 dad 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 Toledo. 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.

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After dinner, Sam had Kurt get his guitar out.

“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.

“Now what?”

“Well, we’re going to be a team. I’m going to play the chords and you’re going to do the strumming. And we’re going to sing. And whether it’s good or bad, it will be great because I love to sing with you and hold you close.”

“Okay.”

“First off, we’ll do ‘Lucky’ because we’ve done that one before.” Sam moved his hand into position and Kurt started to strum. They sang back and forth.

Carole had gotten about two steps from the door when the music started. She smiled. She waited until the song was coming to an end. She stepped into the doorway as they ended. When she saw them, she smiled even bigger. She hadn’t thought about how they were managing to do it until she saw them. She took her phone out and took their picture. She got a double eye roll, which just made her chuckle.

“Sounds great, guys. I came up to see how Sam’s feeling.”

“Meh. My hand still kind of hurts, but not noticeably, if that makes sense. The pain killers are doing their job. It still hurts just enough to make me certain of that.”

“I see. I am off tomorrow, so I’ll be around if you need anything. I’ll bring lunch up around noon. You can text me if you need anything at any point in time.”

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome, honey. I’ll let you two get back to your music.” She went back downstairs.

They fumbled their way through a few more songs, in the end they were laughing more than they were singing. Kurt put Sam’s guitar back.

“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.”

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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.

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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.

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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,”

Sam went to Finn’s room to retrieve what he had made and put it on the table. He walked over to the bathroom. “Okay, open the door, but keep your eyes closed.”

Kurt opened the door. Sam reached for him and guided him to the end of the table.

“Open your eyes.”

“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?”

“Not 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.
Chapter 18

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.”

“Oh. 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 a month from today. 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.”

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 interesting 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 news 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 outing – 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?”

“Yep.”

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 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.”

“I’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?”

“What ever 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.

“We 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 sunrise.

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….”
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’ rule. That messes up what we had talked about if you decide not to go to college.”

“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.

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“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.

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.

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.”

Finn said, “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.

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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 redec 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.”

“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.

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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.

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“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 loaded, 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, your parent's place.”

“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 splashed 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 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
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 perfect.”

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’s 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.”

{[ extra text here ]}

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 Downy 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 of 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.” He sat down next to Brittany.

“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.

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.

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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 than 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.

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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 in 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 you’re new.”

“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.”

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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. Kurt sat 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.”

“Oh, 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 discretely 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.

"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.”

“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.”
Chapter 21

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?”

“The 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.
“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.

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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 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 go to 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. Rouher 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 gone, 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
“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.

“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 is incomplete.”

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 me?”

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.

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“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.”
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Thursday morning, Kurt woke up much earlier than the alarm had been set for. He tried to get out of bed without disturbing Sam, but when he moved, Sam turned into his octopus snuggle persona and wrapped himself around Kurt tighter and pulled him closer.

“Not yet,” Sam mumbled. “S’not time yet. Cuddles.”

Kurt giggled. He relaxed back into Sam’s embrace.

“Mmm, better.” As Sam woke up a little more, he began to run his hand along Kurt’s side. “Sexy cuddles.”

Kurt grabbed his hand gently and pulled it up to his lips and kissed his knuckles. “Always sexy cuddles with you. How could they not be?” He put Sam’s hand over his heart and put his hand on top still being gentle with Sam’s hand. “I love you. I’m sorry I woke you up so early.”

“I’m not upset or surprised. You’re stressed out.” Sam slid his hand out from under Kurt’s and put it over the top. “I have some ideas of ways to help you relax.” He ran his hand down Kurt’s chest slowly. He started kissing the back of Kurt’s neck. “Shall I demonstrate my ideas?”

“Definitely.”

Sam rolled back on to his back. “Come on, then. Come over here.”

By the time they made it downstairs for breakfast, Sam had helped him relax three times and he had already taken a short nap. Sam had mastered the art of eating left handed quite well, allowing them to eat breakfast while holding hands. Kurt’s face radiated nothing but pure love and happiness. Not a trace of anxiety could be seen anymore. Sam had not only left him feeling physically high on endorphins, but he had spoken such words of complete support that Kurt’s feelings about the importance of the election faded in comparison with Sam’s belief in him to do what he wanted whether he won the election or not.

Kurt started to get a little silly and started feeding Sam his breakfast. And Sam played along and started feeding Kurt his breakfast. They were both laughing when Carole walked in.

Kurt said, “I’m sorry if we woke you up. We’ll keep it down.”

“No, no. Absolutely not. You two are always laughing. I love hearing it.”

“Okay, as long as we weren’t disturbing you. I know you don’t have to work today.”

“You’re right I don’t.” She looked at Sam, obviously thinking about something, and laughed. “I haven’t seen you sporting the shirt you made.”

“That’s for next Friday – when we have Glee. I will put a short-sleeved button up on over the top. That way the most I can be told is to button my shirt or if I’m made to take it off, I can just wear
the button-up by itself.”

“Alright then. I’ll be prepared to play dumb at some point next Friday.” She laughed again.
“How’s your glass blowing class going?”

“I love it. It’s just so different from any other type of art. I haven’t gotten even remotely good at it, but I’m hoping to get better in the next four weeks.”

“It seems like the type of thing you need a lot of time to get good at.”

“It is, but it’s also a lot more forgiving in some ways. I can make something and give it to you and it can be absolutely beautiful and not look a thing like what I had wanted to make, but you won’t know the difference. And unlike a lot of art forms, it can be reheated and made into something new. So, if I completely botch something, there is still some chance of turning it into something pretty still. But to make the amazing pieces I’ve seen, it would take a lot more practice than I’m going to get in a 6-week course.”

“Have you two made decisions on where you’re going to apply to college?”

“We have.” Kurt said. “We haven’t told anyone yet. I’m not sure when we will. I’m not interested in having a conversation about it with Rachel. She’s hell-bent on a particular college in New York City that she says is the best. But it’s not ranked number one on any list I’ve seen. Not that I am applying to the number one ranked school because we’re applying to places that we can hopefully afford, which means places in Ohio. But please don’t say anything in front of Finn. We’re getting along much better, actually really well now, but he can’t keep a secret. It’s better if he just doesn’t know until I’m ready for everyone to know.”

“I get that. Don’t forget we’re having a family dinner tonight instead of tomorrow night because of the football game being an away game and Finn not coming home for dinner tomorrow.”

Sam nodded.

“We remember. We need to get going. Sam has swimming practice before school and I’m going to see if I can rally any more seniors to vote for me.”

“I’ll see you two tonight, then.”

The election was held during the first 30 minutes of second period. Kurt and Sam voted and left.

“Since we don’t have to go to the game tomorrow and my parents aren’t going to be home, I want to have a fun date night at home. So, can you look through Netflix or Amazon and find something fun to watch?”

“Sure. We could play some of the Wii Sports games. We haven’t played in a long time, but I’m pretty sure there are ones that just use the motion sensor mostly and not a bunch of buttons.”

“Sound fun. And we can cook together and dance around in the kitchen while we cook together and we’ll eat downstairs, like an indoor picnic. We’ll still go to sleep at a decent time though. Sebastian will be here to go with us to Toledo Saturday morning. I’m not sure who he’s bringing. He wouldn’t say. Maybe it’s another new student. Anyway, he assured me that the person is actually 18. I wish Nick and Jeff were already 18. It would be fun for them to go with us.”

“I’ll do our laundry and pack this afternoon while you’re at work.”
At 2:30, a call came into the shop for Burt. He went in his office and picked up.

“Hello?”

“This is Principal Beiste.”

“Yes. What can I do for you?”

“I need you and Kurt to come over to the school at 3:00 when classes let out.”

“What for?”

“I’d rather discuss that in person.”

“Alright, fine. We’ll be there.”

Kurt and Burt entered Coach Beiste’s office at the requested time. Neither of them sat down, but Kurt closed the door behind them.

“Can you please tell me why you called us both down here?”

“Sure, Mr. Hummel. There seems to have been some irregularities with the Student Council ballot boxes.”

Kurt asked, “What do you mean by ‘irregularities’?”

“Kurt won, but by 190 votes.”

Burt said, “Well, that’s great. Right?”

“Well, the problem is that there are more ballots than there are seniors and Kurt won by a suspiciously wide margin.”

“No. No, I didn’t do it. I didn’t cheat. I mean I thought I about it, but I didn’t.”

Burt interrupted, “What do you mean you thought about it?”

“I thought about it because I wanted to win so badly, and I was worried that I wouldn’t, but I didn’t cheat. I worked really hard on this. I didn’t cheat.”

The consequences of the ballot box stuffing were discussed. Once he had been dismissed, he walked out of the office and ran into Finn and Rachel, who had seen him come in the building and waited around to see why he was there.

“Someone stuffed the ballot boxes. They think I did it. If they can prove it, I’ll be suspended.”

“Oh, my God, Kurt,” Rachel said.

“And I lost. I lost the election. The worst part is that I really thought for a second that I had won.”

Finn just stood there, not knowing what to say.

Rachel said, “I’m so sorry.”
Kurt wasn’t managing to keep it together anymore and said, “I have to go home and talk to Sam.” He hurried away, not looking back. He got out to the parking lot and Burt was waiting for him. He got in the truck and they drove back to the shop. He got out of the truck and went inside. He remembered on the way to the shop that Sam was at occupational therapy, not at home. He decided to work and wait to see Sam later.

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When Kurt got home, he headed straight up the stairs and stripped and got into the shower. He was hot and tired and felt disgusting. He stood under the water and the tears began to flow.

“Kurt?”

“Yeah, sweetie?”

“You’re crying. Can I get in there with you?”

“Of course.”

Less than two minutes later, Sam was in the shower. He grabbed Kurt’s shampoo. “Let me do it, please?”

Kurt nodded. He handed Sam the washcloth when he finished with his hair. Once Sam had finished, he let Kurt do the same for him. Sam stepped reached out and grabbed Kurt’s towel and handed it to him before he stepped out to get his own. He dried quickly and went out to their dresser and brought back boxer briefs for them both and they put them on. They hung their towels up and Sam followed Kurt back out to the bed. Kurt pulled the covers back and lay down, covering himself with just the sheet. Sam went around and lay down as well, lifting his arm and leaving room for Kurt to snuggle up to him, which he did. Kurt wrapped himself around Sam the way Sam usually did to him. Sam wrapped his arm around Kurt and held him close. Kurt ran his fingers through Sam’s hair and drew patterns on Sam’s chest. They lay that way for a half-hour before Kurt said anything.

“I lost the election. Someone stuffed the ballot boxes with my name marked on the ballots. There were more ballots than there are seniors. There were 190 votes for me. It’s being investigated. I have no idea how. There aren’t any cameras in the gym. But if it’s determined that I did it, I’ll be suspended and it will go on my permanent record.”

“That doesn’t even make sense. Who would stuff the ballot box with that many extra ballots? There’s, what? Less than 200 seniors total? If someone wanted you to win, it would have made sense to put like 40 or 50 extra ballots with your name on them to make sure that it wasn’t suspicious. I doubt all of the seniors voted, plus I’m sure there’s always a little cheating on someone’s part. So, if there had been just 20 extra ballots, they wouldn’t have had any way of knowing which candidate padded their ballot count.”

“It doesn’t matter. I tried to get a new count done. I mean Brittany only got 58 votes and Rick got 15. So, that wasn’t even half of the votes. It means I won, but I’ve lost since the school won’t agree to a do over. I’m guessing that whoever it was put 100 ballots with my name in because it would make sense for me to have gotten 90 votes and the total count being 163 seniors voting.”

“That makes sense. Like I said, if whoever did it had put 40 instead of 100, the total would have been 15+58+130. Which would come to … 203. A completely believable turnout. With only 73 votes for the other two combined, I don’t see why they don’t redo the election and this time hand out one ballot per person and let people have a private spot to check off their choice and then exit...
the booth to put their single ballot into a box as Coach Beiste watches. Coach Sue can keep anyone from going back in the gym to vote twice. It’s not that hard.”

“I know that. But it’s not going to change anything. Brittany is going to be announced as the winner. I’ve been eliminated whether I cheated or not.”

“It’s just wrong.”

Kurt took a deep breath and let it out. “It’s over. Mercedes tried to get me to join the Troubletones. She said I’ve been done just as wrong as the girls that are defecting. I’m pretty sure that we’re just going to have Rachel, Tina, and Quinn left when we go to Glee Monday morning.”

“They won’t have enough members to compete.”

“How long do you think it will take Santana to get some Cheerios to join?”

“I hadn’t considered that because I didn’t really think the other girls would leave. I mean Sugar is sweet, but she can’t sing. I didn’t think they’d follow her to Ms. Corcoran’s group.”

“It will be us who comes up short on members. Me, you, Finn, Mike, Puck, Artie, Rory, Blaine, Rachel, Quinn, and Tina – that only makes 11.”

“We need more girls.”

“Or songs that are suitable for an all-guys or mostly-guys group.”

“Maybe they’ll give it up and come back before Sectionals.”

“Fat chance. Mercedes and Santana have wanted their chance to shine for ages.”

Kurt cell phone pinged. “Oh, crap. The family dinner. We’re late. Get dressed.”

Kurt hopped up and grabbed some yoga pants and his Hulkling hoodie. Sam saw what he put on and grabbed his Wiccan hoodie and some sweatpants. They made it downstairs in less than five minutes and were sitting at the table.

“I’m sorry, Dad. I came home and took a shower and lay down for a few minutes. It’s been a long day.”

“It’s fine. Let’s just get started eating before the food gets cold.”

They passed the food around and everyone served themselves and started to eat. Once Burt had finished, he began to talk.

“So, you already know that Sue is running against Reggie for the open congressional seat.”

The three teens nodded.

“Well, I’ve decided to enter the election as a write-in candidate, as an independent. I don’t think either one of them should be in Congress. I’ll be appearing on the local news tomorrow evening announcing my candidacy. I wanted the three of you to know before I announce it publicly.”

“Wow. I want to be part of your campaign, somehow,” Kurt said.

Finn said, “Yeah, we have to be able to do something to help.”
“We’ll talk more about that later. I don’t want any of you to talk about it tomorrow, though. So, if you don’t think you can keep it to yourself, you’ll need to stay home from school.”

They all nodded.

“You’ll be gone a lot,” Kurt said.

“I will, but the three of you are 18 and I expect you to behave like adults when we’re not here. If I win, Carole will come with me to DC part of the time. I’m not going to just move there and leave her here. Plus, there are breaks when the congressional staff goes home to spend time with their constituents. I’ll be home some of the time.”

Carole said, “We’ll get more organized and work out details if Burt wins.”

Kurt nodded.

“After tomorrow evening, there’s a good chance that the press will start showing up. You three need to not say anything to the press. No matter how many times they ask you questions, just walk past and say nothing. I’m having a security company out tomorrow morning. We’ll discuss the specifics of how it works after they’ve set it up. That’s it for now. You can go back to doing whatever needs done.”

Finn stayed at the table and helped himself to seconds. Kurt and Sam cleared their places and put their dishes in the dishwasher. Carole had obviously washed the pots and pans while she was waiting for the two of them to come down. They went back upstairs.

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Kurt pulled his Government textbook out of his bag and took it to the bed. Sam had already propped their pillows up and gotten comfortable. Kurt sat between his legs and leaned back against him. He read their assigned pages out loud. Once he finished, they both finished up the questions that were due the next day. Sam took his down and printed them and put them in his binder.

While he was gone, Kurt pulled out the book they were reading in their English class. When he came back, Sam got his copy of the book out and the iPod with the audio version on it and snuggled next to Kurt. Kurt had tried to listen to the audio with Sam, but got frustrated because he could read it faster on his own, plus he had written French homework to do that Sam didn’t have. So, Kurt read the book on his own, getting done more quickly, giving him time to do his French homework, while Sam continued to listen to the book.

They worked on their math problems next. Since it took Sam a really long time to write each problem down and work through it, they came to the conclusion that Kurt talking through each step of the problems making sure that Sam knew what to do and them working on the problems together made more sense. Kurt made sure that Sam solved one of each type equation on his own before they moved on. The whole process made more sense since their instructor never collected their homework.

Kurt shut the notebook they did the problems in and put it on the shelf. “That’s it. No more. Let’s get in bed. I want to snuggle and talk.”

“Me too, but first let’s actually get ready to sleep. That way we can just snuggle until we fall asleep after we talk.”

“Good plan.”
Ten minutes later, they had completed everything and were in bed snuggled up.

“Ten minutes later, they had completed everything and were in bed snuggled up.

“A while ago, I guess it’s been two and a half weeks, we stopped and talked on the way back to the Labor Day cookout.”

“Yeah.”

“And then the orthopedist refused to sign the release to work form.”

“Right.”

“And I’ve been thinking about what you said. And I’ve been thinking about how much I’ve been working. It’s too much. Twenty hours a week is too much. I know I wanted to save for college, but I can work more next summer. And I can work every summer. If I work all summer, I can come close to covering my room and board at one of the colleges we’ve been looking at. That’s good enough. My dad says he’s going to help and if I have to take out a $5000 loan each year, I can pay that back pretty quickly once I graduate, even if I go back to working at my dad’s shop for a year because I don’t find a job in my field. You were right. It’s better to do well and not be so stressed.”

“Okay. So, what’s your plan?”

“I don’t have one exactly. But Finn wants to work at the shop too. Maybe Dad can train him and he can do the tire rotations like you were doing before. Maybe even the oil changes. I think having Thursdays off would help the most. It would give me all afternoon and evening to complete whatever I have left for the week. Plus, then when I get off on Fridays, I won’t be coming home to homework. I’ll talk to Dad about it. Have you thought about what I said?”

“I did. And you’re right too. I thought about my parents. Most of their married life my dad has made more than my mom, but when he lost his job, she was making more than he was. He didn’t make a big deal out of it. I got a second job. We all did what we could. No one acted like one of us was doing more than the other. I want to be able to look back and say that we’ve been a team. If there comes some point in time when I’m making more money than you, I don’t want you to feel like you shouldn’t eat or for you to refuse to go out to the movies with me or whatever, so I can’t act that way now toward you. We’re young and so it feels weird because we’re still not living on our own, but if we were, I can’t see us having a separate account where you deposit all of your money and I deposit all of mine in another account and you buy your groceries out of your money and I buy groceries out of my money and then when I don’t make enough, I cut out eating, or the same for you. I would never allow that. I would never allow you to go hungry because you lost your job or you got sick and didn’t get paid. I can’t expect you to let me make that choice either. I had to think about it from the opposite perspective before I could realize that I was thinking about it all wrong. I didn’t want to be a burden, but then I realized that I would never consider you a burden just because you hadn’t been able to keep up with everything and work too.”

“Good. So, it’s settled. We won’t do anything outlandish or out of the ordinary without sitting down and talking about it first. And you are absolutely right that I don’t consider you to be a burden – at all. Actually, I feel the exact opposite. Having you in my life makes the hard things in my life so much easier to bear. Your love and support has completely and totally improved my life. You’re a gift, not a burden.”

Kurt kissed him, gently first, and then building in intensity quickly. He pressed in and Sam pulled him closer and kissed him back passionately. Kurt slowed their kissing back down to sweet gentle kisses. He ran his fingers through Sam’s hair and kissed along his jaw. He spoke quietly directly in Sam’s ear. “I love you. You’re the most amazing person I’ve ever met. You’re my favorite person in the whole world.” He rearranged a bit and nuzzled into Sam’s neck and breathed in his scent.
Sam kissed Kurt on the forehead. “I love you too. You’re my best friend and my favorite person. Are you ready to sleep?”

“Mmm hmm. Just like this.”

Sam kissed him on the forehead again.

Sebastian and Dylan arrived in time to eat breakfast with everyone except Finn who was still asleep. Burt knew that Sebastian was back in town, but he hadn’t see him yet. Kurt opened the door to let him in.

“Good morning, Bas.”

Sebastian and his companion stepped inside the house.

“Morning. This is my boyfriend, Dylan.”

Dylan was taller than Kurt, but shorter than Sebastian with a slim build, similar to Kurt. His hair was straight and slightly darker than Sebastian’s. He had a light complexion with pale hazel eyes.

“It’s nice to meet you. Come on into the dining room. Breakfast is ready.”

The three of them walked into the dining room together.

“Sebastian Smythe you have grown three feet since I last saw you,” Burt teased.

“Maybe just two and a half Uncle Burt. I was 8, not a toddler.”

Burt got up and pulled him into a hug. “It’s great to have you back. Kurt wouldn’t shut up the night he and Sam ran into you at that overpriced coffee shop.”

Sebastian laughed. “It’s good to see you too. Uncle Burt, this is my boyfriend, Dylan.”

“It’s nice to meet you, sir.”

“Don’t ‘sir’ him,” Sam said.

Dylan looked confused, but still extended his hand to shake Burt’s.

“It’s nice to meet you too, Dylan. And Sam’s right. Don’t ‘sir’ me. Just call me Burt or Uncle Burt if you prefer since that’s what Sebastian calls me. This is my wife, Carole. And Finn is still asleep.

A groggy Finn walked into the room. “Am not. I heard the doorbell and when I came out of my room, I smelled bacon.” Finn waved at the guests and plopped in his chair. “Hi.”

“Finn, this is Sebastian, whose mom and my mom were best friends, as were we before he and his mom moved to France when we were 8. And that’s Dylan, his boyfriend.”

“Nice to meet you,” Sebastian said.

Finn nodded.

Carole started passing the platters, plates, and bowls around. “Help yourselves.”

Everyone took what they wanted and passed everything around.
“So, what are you up to these days, Sebastian?” Burt asked.

“Well, getting settled in at Dalton mostly. I auditioned for the Warblers at the beginning of the semester. So, did Dylan. That’s where we met.”

“Good, good. They’re a good group. Not quite as good as the group at McKinley, but you and Kurt put on plenty of shows for us, so maybe with you and Dylan and whoever else joined new this year, you’ll have a chance to beat the Glee kids.”

“Maybe,” Sebastian said. “I’ve heard that Kurt trained them out of their shuffle step last year, so maybe there’s hope for us.”

Kurt smiled. “I did. There’s a lot of talent, no doubt. The downside is that you have no girls and your choice of costuming involves your uniforms. I suggested that even wearing the sweater vests with the oxfords rolled up to mid-forearm would give more flexibility in movement.”

“We’ll see,” Sebastian said. “The food is delicious.”

“Thank you,” Carole said. “I know we don’t know each other yet, but I would be fine with you calling me Aunt Carole, if you’d prefer.”

Sebastian smiled and nodded.

“Dylan, tell us a little about yourself. Are you a senior like the rest of these guys?”

“I am.” The instant he began to speak, it was obvious that Dylan wasn’t a local. “Let’s see. My father took a 2-year guest lecturer position at Ohio State University and I didn’t want to come with him last year, but I came to my senses and decided that a year abroad would be a good learning experience for me, so I came at the beginning of August and started at Dalton at the beginning of the school year.”

“Where are you from?” she asked.

“A place called Brockley that’s slightly southeast of London. And yes, I’ve already heard all of the jokes about being from a place named after a vegetable, but it’s not. It’s B-R-O-C-K-L-E-Y. It just sounds similar to the way Americans say broccoli.”

Burt said, “Well, you’re welcome to hang around here and study the locals if you’re ever in town.”

Dylan laughed, “Thank you.”

“So, you four are headed up to Toledo, then?” he asked.

“Yeah, Dad. The three of us are going to tour the art museum during Sam’s class. Then we’re going to head to the lake for a while and go to some other touristy places.”

“Sounds good.”

Kurt managed to corner Sebastian in the museum while Dylan was carefully examining a statue.

“Boyfriend?”

“Friends with benefits?”
“So you don’t like him?”

“Of course I like him. He’s here with me, isn’t he?” He lowered his voice until no one could hear him except Kurt. “I didn’t say he was a fuck buddy.”

“I don’t get it.”

Sebastian stopped, causing Kurt to stop. Sebastian pointed to the painting, but then stepped behind Kurt, standing very close to him and continued to speak so no one else could hear him. “Look, you and Sam warned me off Scandals. Not that many of the guys at school are already 18, which limits my choices if I want to go out clubbing with them. I went out last Wednesday to the place you told me about by myself. It was nice, but all of the guys I met were college students. I’m pretty open-minded, but I really don’t like hooking up in bathroom stalls and I’m not interested in being roofied at a dorm party. I’m trying to play the well-behaved son and keep my dad off my back. Getting a call to come to the ER in Columbus somewhere won’t do that. So, I made a list of all of the guys at Dalton that seemed like possibilities based on how they reacted to my blatant flirting last week and whether or not they’ll be 18 by the end of the month. I enlisted Nick and Jeff’s help with how old the guys were. I listed them in order of my personal take on their looks, overall personality, and apparent interest level. I started with Dylan. He’s smart, funny, good-looking, and going back to England at the end of the school year, so he’s not looking for true love, but isn’t interested in playing the role of ‘monk at a boys’ school’ all year.”

“So, you like him as a person, at least what you know so far, you’re both 18, and you’re sure he’s not looking for anything serious?”

“Why the grilling?”

“Because I care about you and I don’t want drama for you. I told you that Dalton is a safe place, but I just want to make sure you’re not getting involved with someone whose family will make trouble if they find out that you’re sleeping with their son.”

“His family has no ties to the school whatsoever. His whole family knows that he’s gay. His dad chose Dalton because it has an IB program.”

“Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Yeah. I’m not going to make value judgments on your relationships. If you want to sleep with 100 guys, that’s your choice and I won’t shame you for it. If you want to slip off to New York and marry Dylan, that’s also your choice. I just don’t want trouble for either one of you.”

“Thanks. Sorry for getting testy. People making moral judgments is why we discussed the terminology we’re using. We’ve told people we’re dating exclusively. He and I both want the same thing. Someone we can trust to have sex with that doesn’t come with all of the baggage of ‘Will you love me forever?’ when the two of us won’t be here in 9 months. We both figured it would be easier to just be ‘boyfriends’ than to use a description that required an explanation. Neither one of us wants to play ‘fuck the curious schoolboy’ this year. That causes drama. So, our first date was last Saturday morning. We went to the local reproductive health clinic for a full battery of STD testing and then out to breakfast. You’re the only person I’ve told about the pre-breakfast part of the date.”

Kurt laughed, but caught himself and stopped so he wouldn’t disturb other museum visitors. “He seems very interested in that statue.”
“His dad’s a sculptor.”

“Interesting.”

“Why is that so interesting?”

“Sam is an artist. He wants to be a potter or sculptor. His hand injury is calling that possibility into question, but he’s still applying to college to pursue an art degree.”

“Well, maybe we can introduce them at some point.”

“So you’ve met his dad?”

“Yeah, we had dinner with him last night. We’re having dinner with my dad tomorrow before we go back to Dalton.”

“So you told your dad?”

“I did. He already knew. He’s fine. He was happy for me that you and I had already found each other and that I had found a ‘nice guy I liked so quickly.’ He said he was going to invite your dad out to lunch one day this coming week.”

“Good.” Kurt looked around the gallery. “I think we’ve seen everything in this room twice.”

“Meh. Dylan seems to like this room and you’ve been to this museum several times. Might as well let him look at what he wants to. We can just sit on that bench over there until he’s ready to move on to the next gallery.”

“So, you two have already…”

“What? Oh, oh yeah. I’m in a double with a private bath, but since I enrolled late, I don’t have a roommate. He’s in a double suite. My lack of roommate and private bathroom are convenient.”

“Mmm hmm.”

“Have you and Sam not? Just curious from the way you’re acting.”

“No. Well, I guess it depends on personal definitions. Nothing that requires prep.”

“Got it. But the rest?”

“Yeah.”

“So, do you and Dylan have a lot of classes together?”

“Everything except French. He’s in Spanish.”

“Is everything going okay?”

“It is. You seem really concerned.”

“I just struggled with fitting in last year. I think it’s just me. I’m 95% certain that I’m just never going to fit in anywhere.”

“That’s okay, you know. Being different is fine, if you’re happy with yourself and your life. You don’t have to live someone else’s dream life. Make your own way. Do your own thing.”
“You sound like Sam.”

“Then, Sam’s a smart man.”

Kurt elbowed Sebastian gently. “I’ll tell him you said so.”

“I’ll tell him myself. Is he okay with our reunion?”

“Yeah, why wouldn’t he be?”

“My experience with being friends with gay guys has led me to believe that most of them do not appreciate another gay guy hanging around with their boyfriend.”

“Oh. Well, Sam knows I love him and I’m not the type to cheat on someone.”

“Okay, then.”

Dylan walked up to them. “Sorry to hold you two back.”

“We’re fine.” Sebastian said. “Still catching up on things. Ten years is a long time to be gone. Ready to go to the next room?”

“Sure.”

Kurt texted Sam their location when his class was over. He met up with them in the museum. He approached from the other side of the room and walked up behind Kurt and wrapped his arms around him.

“Having fun?”

“This museum has a really nice collection for a town this size, especially considering that there’s no admission fee. I really had low expectations when Sebastian described our destination, but my prejudices were unwarranted.”

Sam said, “That’s what Kurt and I thought the first time we came here.”

“We haven’t seen everything, but perhaps we can return sometime and see more. We’re headed to the lake for lunch next, yeah?”

“We are. We have picnic packed in the back already. Shall we then?” Kurt asked.

Sam unwrapped his arms and took Kurt’s hand. They turned to leave the gallery and headed to the parking lot.

Kurt and Sebastian carried the cooler to the picnic table they had parked near. Dylan and Sam grabbed the rest of the stuff from the back. Sam spread out the tablecloth before they sat down. Kurt began pulling things out and handing them to Sam, who took the lids off and put in the center of the picnic table. There were four different sandwiches, two different vegetable dips, and bowls of cut up vegetables and fruits. Kurt pulled out a container with the low carb cookies Sam liked and another with chocolate chip and peanut butter cookies.

“I didn’t know what you would like, so we have a variety of things. Take whatever you like. Sam
and I like everything we brought, so you two choose first.”


They filled their plates. They talked while they ate.

“So, your stepbrother is our age?” Dylan asked.

“I’m a couple of months older than he is. We’re in the same grade. His mom and my dad got married last November, so 10 months ago.”

“So, recently.”

“Yes. I didn’t really start to live with him full time until right before school this fall.”

Dylan and Sebastian both looked confused.

“I was at Dalton until school got out. Once school was out, Finn went to stay with his great aunt in Zanesville and he didn’t come back until football camp started before school. It’s new. We’re doing better.”

“I have one brother, but he’s four years older than me. He’s already finished uni and got his first job about a month ago. That’s one of the reasons I decided to go ahead and give Ohio a go. He was moving out and I figured everything would be different with him gone anyway, so I might as well give America a go and see what it’s like living here. So, far it’s working out well.” He shoulder bumped Sebastian. “The IB Program is just a continuation of what I was doing before. And I get to meet a lot of new people and see new places.”

“Maybe one day when Dalton has a school break and we don’t, you two can come over and we’ll arrange for you to spend the day a McKinley with Finn. That would give you both another perspective on life as an American teen. Being at Dalton is not typical of schooling here at all.”

Dylan said, “That would actually be quite interesting. I bet I could use the information I gather in some type of compare and contrast essay for my writing class.”

Sam laughed, “Your contrast list would be quite long and the compare list would include things like there are students, desks, and teachers.”

“That different then, yeah?”

Sam nodded. “That different. I never attended Dalton, but I’ve spent time there and I went to an all-boys private school when we lived in Tennessee before we moved here last year.”

Sebastian said, “All of this is really good. Did your stepmother make all of it?”

Kurt answered, “No, Sam made most of it when I was work yesterday. I helped with the rest when I got home.”

Dylan asked, “Where do you work?”

“In my dad’s shop. I’m a mechanic.”

“That’s a great field. People are always needing their cars fixed.”

“It’s my backup line of work. I want to be a performer, but that won’t always pay the bills and fixing cars is steady work.”
“That’s true. My mum’s hoping I’ll change my mind and be a barrister like her.”

Kurt said, “From your attention to detail at the museum, I’m guessing that you’d rather study art.”

Dylan smiled. “That’s true. My father’s a sculptor. As am I, but the world’s a different place and I don’t know if there’s a career in it anymore, unless I want to move onto teaching like he has.”

Sam started telling Dylan about meeting Alan Cottrill and the two of them got into a really detailed conversation that Sebastian and Kurt had nothing to add to.

After they ate and packed the picnic stuff back in the Navigator, they went for a hike in the woods. Sam and Dylan were still talking about art. Kurt and Sebastian let them get about 3 meters ahead so they could talk to each other more easily.

“Explain to me how dating exclusively is different from this friends with benefits arrangement you have with Dylan.”

“This really confuses you, doesn’t it?”

“It does and I’m trying to figure it out. Are my questions bothering you? I can ask Google my questions when I get back to Lima tomorrow night.”

“Smartass. Your questions aren’t bothering me, They’re just somewhat confusing. I’ve never been the monogamous type. I see a good-looking guy who flirts back when I flirt, and I get him in bed. I rock his world, and hopefully he rocks mine. We go our separate ways. If we run into each other again and he’s repeat-worthy, I’ll do the same thing. If not, I just move on and find someone else. I don’t like sex in public bathrooms though. I like to take my time and make the guy fall apart. This led to me bringing guys home. Maman was cool with me bring guys from school home, but when I brought home someone too old to be in high school, it upset her. I was rebellious and did it anyway. I’m always careful. Condoms for everything. I had gone through all of the willing guys at school and only found a few of them to be repeat-worthy and even at that, a lot of them went out carousing and they weren’t always available when I was in the mood. Anyway, I might have seduced a few ‘straight’ guys, otherwise known as closeted guys whose families were quite upset to find their son had a gay lover. So, to cut the story short, my mother got fed up with my philandering and sent me to Ohio in hopes that I would find the straight and narrow here and that maybe my dad could influence me in some way that she had been unable to.”

“I see.”

“Does that somehow change us being friends?”

“Nope, not at all. As long as everyone was of consenting age and they all consented, I’m fine. Maybe the look of utter lack of understanding comes more from the fact that I currently know six out gay gays including you and Dylan and two closeted guys. And a year ago I knew zero. I met a closeted gay guy, but didn’t know he was gay at the time about a year ago. I met Blaine in early March. That was Sam. I met another at Dalton last spring. Nick and Jeff didn’t come out to me until school was getting out last spring. Blaine and I were the only two openly out guys at Dalton. There may have been plenty of others who were out to their close friends, but not to the general population of the school.”

“I get it now. So, you’ve not been around people who have sex just because they enjoy having
“Yes and no. I know a guy and two girls who fit that description, but I wouldn’t know how to define them. One of the girls clearly just enjoys the physical act and isn’t remotely manipulative or punitive with her attention. She approaches people, they say yes or no and she just moves on if they say no. She is most likely bisexual. The other girl uses it as a way to have power over her conquests. She is obviously skilled because she can manipulate guys with her prowess. She sleeps with the bisexual girl, no others as far as she lets on. The guy is similar, but he pretty much quit when he got a girl pregnant. Now, he’s mostly just a walking innuendo.”

Sebastian laughed. “Maman considered the amount of time I devoting to the pursuit of good-looking, willing guys to be excessive. She had a point. Anyway, Dylan and I sat down and talked about out pasts and our expectations. We had a few days of trying each other out after we got our test results back. We decided to give ourselves a few days to see if we thought we could provide what the other was looking for before we told people we were dating. I was never the type to be interested in being someone’s first. I want to sleep with guys who know what they’re doing. That may sound weird to you, but think about it this way. If your pastime is playing basketball and you only get 30 minutes to an hour a day to spend doing it, you don’t want to spend each time showing someone how to dribble a basketball and help them learn how to throw free throws. You want to pick up a basketball and start playing.”

“Good analogy. And following along with it, I’ve lived in a place where basketball is a sport in a far away land that I had only heard of. And basketball players are shamed into keeping their deviant pastime to themselves. Learning the rules only comes through getting pamphlets that are not readily available.”

“We’ve just had very different lives since we’ve been apart.”

“We have. And I think as long as you can not tease me or treat me like I’m silly for being hesitant or not open about that part of my life, we’ll be fine. You heard Sam’s story on the way here. I never did answer you about why I ended up at Dalton last year. I mentioned that I met one closeted gay guy after I met Blaine. ‘Met’ isn’t an accurate word, but I couldn’t think of anything else right then that wouldn’t make me explain what happened and I didn’t want to do it in the middle of that part of our conversation. Anyway, I already knew this person and he bullied me a lot. I had a broken arm, and four broken ribs from dumpster tosses and locker slams. Innumerable bruises and slushie attacks. Pee balloons thrown at me. Anyway, the guy knocked my phone out of my hand again and I snapped. I followed him to the locker room and found out that he was gay when he forced a kiss on me and tried a second time unsuccessfully. And not long after that, due to things I won’t go into, he threatened to kill me if I told anyone and he upped the bullying to creepy bullying. Things like putting his index finger below my throat and running his finger down my chest when no one was around.”

“That’s awful. That’s assault.”

“It is, but that’s how being gay has been for me.”

“I can see how you would struggle with free love lifestyle in concept. I can also see how it would be daunting to have your first experience with someone with who has no idea what he’s doing. If at some point, you think you’re ready while I’m still in Ohio, I’d be glad to walk you through it, not a personal demonstration. I know you and Sam love each other and I have no intention of causing any problems. He and Dylan seem to have hit it off. Maybe he’d be willing to do the same with Sam. That way, you’d both have a little more confidence and less reliance on following some diagrams in a pamphlet.”
“I appreciate that. I’ve tried watching pornography and I just can’t. So, maybe some verbal guidance would be nice at some point in time.”

“I think maybe we’re just on opposite ends of two spectrums as well. Both 100% gay, but you are a romantic and it seems not all that driven by sexual attraction. And I’m pretty much the exact opposite. It’s not that I would never consider settling down, but I’ve never met anyone that I was interested in romantically right off the bat. Those butterflies, the flushing, and the desire to spend all of my time doing things with and for someone – that just doesn’t happen to me. I see a guy who’s hot and I want to have sex with him. His interests outside of having hot steamy sex with me make no difference whatsoever. That’s why this thing with Dylan is so different.”

“I think you’re right. I see a guy who’s hot and I think, ‘What a hot guy.’ Nothing flashes to my mind or other body parts that make me want to walk up to him and say anything or do anything remotely sexual with him. This actually explains a lot of the ‘guy talk’ I’ve heard over the years. Guys talking about which girls they would do just by looking at them. That never made any sense to me and I thought it was just because I get nothing out of looking at girls, but I didn’t feel that way about guys, but I chalked it up to being afraid of showing interest. Dylan’s a good-looking guy and I can see the appeal, but as two hypothetically single gay guys, I would not approach him for anything other than to find out if we have any mutual interests and then attempt to befriend him if we do. After we got to know each other a little, I might develop an interest in something besides friendship.”

“Definitely opposites. But I can acknowledge our differences without the need to belittle your relationship goals. And seeing you be lovey-dovey with Sam will not cause me to want to roll my eyes or act like it’s stupid. I’ve never felt that way, but that doesn’t justify me putting people down for feeling that way.”

“It also explains a LOT about the way the guys at school have treated me. If they are more like you, as a whole, they are going to see me the same way they see themselves, except that THEY could be the ones on the receiving end of highly sexualized thoughts and being propositioned. When I confronted the bully, I made a comment about how all straight guys see gays guys as secretly trying to get a look at their junk, molesting them, and trying to convert them. There’s more truth to that than there is sarcasm, which was my intent. I’m in the minority. They think that if I see one of them naked that I will want to do something sexual about it right then. They assume that seeing them naked would make me act on a sexual impulse like they do with girls.”

“That would be my guess.”

“No wonder I’ve been so confused all these years. Not only am I gay, I’m an unusual guy that doesn’t fit the norm of sexuality and sexual attraction. And random stories from who knows where about gay guys like you seducing ‘straight’ guys and the guys turning out to be gay fuel that fear the guys have. Those stories are about closeted gay guys, but the guys here only know me as the only representation of a gay guy and my closet was transparent. But the guy who bullied me, his closet is 6 inches thick with a steel panic room door on it. No one would ever guess that he’s gay. So, the guys are afraid of me because of these random stories of closeted guys coming out after they’ve had a sexual encounter or relationship with a gay man. It all makes so much more sense now. They think the gay guy turned the straight guy gay.”

“Wow, you have put up with a lot of absolute insanity.”

“Do you think they’re still talking about sculptors?”

Sebastian laughed.
By the time they caught up with Sam and Dylan, they were almost to the lake area where Sam had set up to paint when they were there before. Kurt wrapped his arm around Sam’s waist when he got close enough. Sam reached around and wrapped his arm around Kurt’s as well.

“Dylan invited all of us to stay at his dad’s place if we want to do things in Columbus and not have to spend money on a hotel every time.”

“That’s nice. Thanks, Dylan.”

“No problem. The lake is gorgeous. It’s so much bigger than I had imagined it to be.”

“Why don’t you open your camera app and let me take a couple of pictures.”

“Good idea. That always turns out better than a selfie.”

Kurt took a couple of photos and handed the phone back.

“Scoot in. I do want to take at least a couple of group selfies to send to my mum to prove to her that I’m not just sitting in my dorm room.”

They all looked at the camera and smiled.

“Great!”

“Send that one to me. I’ll send it to my maman as well.”

When they finally reached the sandy beach area, they stopped, rolled their jeans up and took their socks and shoes off and waded down along the edge of the shore. The weren’t rolling waves like the type people surf on, but there were small waves rolling in from the wind. Kurt intentionally walked slower and then stopped and turned to face Sam. He stepped closer and positioned himself to slow dance with Sam. Kurt leaned into Sam and held him close. There was no one around. Kurt kissed the side of Sam’s neck. Sam responded by squeezing Kurt just a little.

“I love you.”

Sam stepped back just a little causing Kurt to look at him. Sam took advantage of his opportunity and kissed Kurt. He kept it chaste and gentle. “I love you too.” He let go of Kurt’s left hand and stepped back again and then tugged.

Kurt followed along and spun himself back into Sam, laughing and smiling.

Sebastian and Dylan looked back and saw them.

Sebastian smiled. He said, “Don’t tease them. What we heard on the drive here about Sam getting the crap kicked out of him for being gay isn’t the only thing they’ve been through. Kurt’s lived his whole life being told that being gay is disgusting and awful and he’s been hurt in more ways than I will go into because it’s his story to tell. But he lost his mom and then all that other crap. If dancing on the edge of a lake in Ohio makes him smile like that, then he should do it. He deserves every bit of happiness he can find.”

Dylan nodded. “I can’t imagine growing up like they did. Sam told me a bit, also his story to tell. The romantic, cutesy thing isn’t for me, but if it makes them happy, then who am I to say otherwise. I’d rather you stick your hand down my pants than dance on the beach, but to each his
Sebastian laughed. His voice sobered. “A year ago, Kurt had never met another gay teenager. This is all very, very new to him. He’s known his whole life he was gay and he was all alone. Sam came out to him a little over six months ago.”

“Sam told me about his huge crush on Kurt for six months before he got up the nerve to tell him.”

“Kurt didn’t tell me that part.”

“There was a lot of risk obviously. And I absolutely won’t tease them. Sam risked a lot and paid the price. Even if their sappiness seems silly, it’s what works for them. I don’t want people criticizing my playboy lifestyle, so I shouldn’t criticize what makes other people happy. We’re going shopping next. Sam’s going to tell Kurt, who I guess is some kind of shopping wizard. I need some winter clothes and I’m sure that you do as well. We’re not used to what winter will bring. A quarter meter of snow and subzero temperatures.”

“Fine by me.”

Kurt came running up behind them with Sam following close behind. “You two look like you’re plotting to take over the world.”

“Not so much,” Dylan said. “I told Sebastian that I told Sam that I needed to go shopping for winter clothes and we were discussing the distasteful winter weather I have heard is common to this area. Snow and very cold temperatures.”

“Both true,” Sam said. “And Kurt is the best shopper ever.”

“I need just one piece of information about this shopping. Are you looking for bargains or are you looking for quality within a single shopping area?”

Dylan answered first. “I’m not a millionaire or anything, but I’m willing to pay retail to avoid spending hours and hours hunting and possibly not ending up with what I need. I don’t have a car of my own here.”

“Sebastian?”

“Same, except I do have a car. I don’t have a spending limit on things I need. So, if we go buy new trainers, my dad won’t say a word, but if I go blow $100 on lottery tickets, that will come out of my allowance.”

“Got it. I know just the place.”

Three hours later, they had found what Dylan and Sebastian needed to stay warm and dry during the upcoming winter, they had checked into their hotel room, and Kurt and Sam had opted to shower first since Kurt took the longest to get ready after showering. Kurt was initially self-conscious about other people knowing that he and Sam showered together, but he recovered fairly quickly when neither Dylan nor Sebastian acted like they expected anything different.

While Kurt and Sam were in the shower, the other two used their alone time in the room for their enjoyment. When they switched places, Kurt noticed that Sebastian turned the music on the TV up as he walked past and winked at Kurt.
Kurt and Sam got ready for the evening while the other two showered. Kurt painted his nails black before he did anything else. Sam used the hair dryer and got dressed in his most form fitting Levis and a fitted black v-neck t-shirt of Kurt’s. He slipped the black combat boots on and struck a pose for Kurt.

Kurt turned his attention to Sam and wrapped his arms around Sam’s neck and kissed him. He went back to work on himself. He put on a thin line of black eyeliner and put some waterproof mascara on. Once that was finished, he put on the button up with the small skulls and crossbones on them that Sam had picked out for him to wear the first night he stayed over. Instead of the kilt like he had worn that day, Kurt put on a pair of form hugging black jeans with enough lycra in them to allow him to move easily in them. The last thing to go on were his vintage-styled studded combat boots. He finished his look by styling his hair like he had for their “Born this Way” performance.

Sebastian and Dylan came out of the bathroom in their jeans. Sebastian looked Kurt up and down, nodded his head, and smirked with his eyebrow raised. It didn’t take long before everyone was ready to head out to the club.

They paid to park in a lot nearby rather than have to walk a long way at the end of the evening.

Sebastian got out quickly and grabbed Sam’s arm to keep him back for a second. “I know you said you two have been out in Columbus, but we don’t know what this place is like. I don’t know if Kurt went dressed like he is tonight, but you can’t take your eyes off of him. He will attract men like flies to honey the instant we step inside this place. With his body and that angelic face, men are going to want to have him.”

“I know. Trust me. And he doesn’t see it. Not at all. He likes dressing up for the fun of it and he really doesn’t get what he does to guys.”

“What are you two over here whispering about like gossiping middle school girls?”

Sam answered, “About how hot you are.”

“Whatever. Come on. Let’s get inside.” He reached out for Sam’s hand.

They got in line and one of the bouncers came down the sidewalk keeping an eye on the crowd. He walked straight over to Kurt.

“You and whoever’s with you, come on.”

Kurt looked confused, and Sebastian pushed him forward a bit. The bouncer looked the four of them up and down and nodded. They followed him to the head of the line. He unhooked a velvet rope and let them through. They briefly showed their IDs, but the guy at the door just nodded them on through.

“They didn’t put those underage bracelets on us,” Kurt said. “Why did we get escorted to the front of the line?”

“Hey Sam, Kurt and I are going to go find a table for a minute, okay?”

“Yeah, sure. Dylan and I will go look around and then come find you.”

Sebastian grabbed Kurt by the wrist and wove in and out of the crowd until he found a place that they could sit down and he could talk to Kurt.
“What’s going on?”

Sebastian practically pulled Kurt into his lap, they were sitting so close. Sebastian spoke directly into Kurt’s ear. “I need you to listen to me. I need you to trust my years of experience and the fact that you know that I’ve loved you like a brother since we were babies.”

Kurt nodded.

“Remember earlier when we were talking about men and sex drives and sexual attraction?”

“Yes.”

“You are like water in an oasis in one of these clubs. You are a perfect male specimen. You’re tall, but not too tall. You’re lean, but not too thin. You’re all sculpted muscle. You have a beautiful, angelic face and a killer ass. The only reason I am not desperately attracted to you is because when I look at you I feel that brotherly love we’ve always had and that’s just a big ‘no’ for me. Why do you think I chose to sit at your table the day we ran into each other in the Lima Bean? I need you to believe me and not the reflection you see in the mirror when you look at yourself. Do not go to the bathroom alone here. I mean that. Don’t drink anything anyone offers you. We can talk more later if you want, but I need you to trust me. You trust me, right?”

“Always.”

“Okay. We’re going to wait here for Sam and Dylan to find us and you’re not going to go anywhere alone.”

Kurt nodded.

Just a couple of minutes later, Sam and Dylan showed up.

Kurt hopped up and wrapped his arms around Sam. “Let’s dance!” Kurt took Sam’s hand and led him out onto the dance floor.

Dylan and Sebastian were right behind them.

They danced for several hours to the thumping music and pulsing lights, only stopping to drink some water now and then. Sam kept Kurt close the whole time, remaining vigilant, but enjoying himself as well. Dylan and Sebastian danced their way through the crowd, dancing with each other some of the time. By 1:30, they were all danced out and headed out of the club to the parking lot.

“Oh, God, I think I may have damaged my hearing. But that was so much fun!” Kurt exclaimed. When they got to the Navigator, Kurt pressed the unlock and they all climbed inside. He locked the doors back immediately. “This was fun. A lot of fun. I think I like the place in Columbus better though because the music here is just a little too loud for my taste.”

“I’m ready to crash,” Sam said. “Let’s get back to the hotel. I need another shower.”

Sebastian said, “I think we all need showers. They needed to crank the A/C up in there.”

They were all starving, so Kurt pulled through a Taco Bell that was open all night and they order two 10-packs of soft tacos and took them into the hotel with them. They wolfed them down and took turns showering again.
“Set the alarm so we get up a half-hour before the breakfast buffet ends so we can go eat our weight in bacon and waffles,” Dylan said.

Kurt looked on the nightstand to check the breakfast hours. He set his phone alarm. He turned the light off and scooted over toward Sam and curled up on his chest and wrapped his leg over Sam’s. They readjusted until they were both comfortable with their bodies intertwined.

The next morning when the alarm went off, the four of them put their swim trunks and t-shirts on and went down to breakfast. Once they had completely eaten their fill, they grabbed towels from their room, left their t-shirts behind and went swimming until 11:00, giving themselves an hour to shower and redress before they had to check out.

After they left the hotel at noon, they went back to the Toledo Art Museum and went through the rest of the galleries, instead of going to the zoo like they had discussed. They all decided the zoo warranted another trip because they were too tired to do as much walking as the zoo would require. Once they finished exploring the museum, they headed back to Lima.

Once they were back, Sebastian and Dylan left right away to have dinner with Sebastian’s dad. Kurt and Sam made themselves something to eat and hung their swim trunks on the drying rack in the laundry room to deal with later. They ate and went upstairs to listen to the most recent audiobook they had checked out while claiming as much of their Sunday snuggles as they could manage for the rest of the evening.

When Sam came out from the kitchen, he sat down next to Kurt and waited for him to look over at him, and then kissed him. “Ready for Glee?”

“Not particularly. It’s becoming less and less of what I had hoped for. I’m assuming that Mr. Schue has decided to just give us all A’s because he hasn’t been giving us any quizzes or tests. I had hoped to actually learn about arranging music or harmony construction or something. Booty camp before school isn’t really all that helpful. It just makes us have to get up that much earlier. It’s chillier out today than it was yesterday. I’m going to run up and grab us jackets.”

When they got to school, most everyone was already there. Everyone was stretching and warming up. Rachel finally showed up after the bell for first period to start had rung.

“Rachel?” Mr. Schue looked up and asked.

She was fighting tears, but spoke through them. “I just told Principal Beiste that I rigged the election so that Kurt would win.” She turned toward him. “Kurt, please don’t hate me. You’re totally in the clear.

Finn asked, “What did she say?”

“She said that she had no choice but to put it on my permanent record and that I’m suspended for a week. Also, she said that I’m banned from competing at Sectionals.”

Everyone was stunned. Now, they were down to 10 members. No one said anything.

Eventually Rachel spoke up again. “I have to go now. I’ll be back next Monday.” She turned and left.
Once Kurt was sure that she was out of the stage area, he said, “We need to find two more people to sing or we won’t have enough people to compete. Since Glee is a class now, it’s basically going to have to be two of the jazz band members because we can’t just randomly recruit some people to stay after school like we could before. People already have a class first period.”

Mr. Schue said, “Let’s move back to the choir room. The jazz band should be in there warming up. I’ll talk to them and see if any of them can sing, even if they sing along so quietly that no one can hear them. The big issue will be if any of them can dance at all.”

Kurt made a beeline for Principal Beiste’s office, hoping that she had time to see him quickly before he and Sam needed to leave for the OSU campus. He sat in the waiting area for a few minutes before he was shown in.

“What I can do for you, Kurt?”

“I’d like a recount for the election. If Rachel told you how many ballots she fraudulently stuffed in, we should be able to determine who actually got the most votes.”

“I’m sorry, Kurt. You’re still disqualified. You won’t face any punishment for Rachel’s actions, but in her confession, she mentioned you saying something about pulling a JFK and her misunderstanding and you explaining yourself. Which is what I’m assuming that you were referring to when you said you had thought about it last Thursday when your dad was here.”

“That’s true, but I didn’t actually do anything.”

“But your statement led to Rachel doing it for you. There’s no way for me to determine the context and tone of voice used in that conversation. She could have misconstrued what you said as an actual request for her to do it for you. You could have actually said it in a way that was an indirect request.”

“Or she could have just decided to do it on her own with no input or vague tone of voice indirect requesting.”

“But I have no way to know.”

“Hold a new election. Have Coach Sue distribute one ballot per person. Allow students to check their candidate of choice inside the booth and then fold the ballot in half. Once it’s folded, have the student exit and place the ballot in a box directly in front of you where you can 100% verify that no student placed more than one ballot in the box.”

“Kurt, the teachers had to rewrite their lesson plans to accommodate for the first election. I’m not asking the teachers to do that a second time in a one-week period. This is a lesson to both of you. Things people overhear you say can affect how other people behave or what they think about you or other people.”

“I have to go to OSU now.” Kurt turned and walked out of her office. He went directly to the parking lot and got in the passenger side of Sam’s truck. He said nothing, but put his seat belt on.

Sam pulled out of the spot and drove across town.

Before they got there, Kurt finally broke the silence. “She won’t redo the election. She says this is a lesson to me to watch what I say where others can overhear me. I won’t face any disciplinary action like Rachel is.”
“Well, that’s good at least. I’m sorry about the election, though.”

“She has a point. I thought I had learned my lesson with what happened last fall, and here I am again having done something similar, saying something out loud in a public place that shouldn’t have been spoken out loud. I need to learn to control what I say. Finn too. Dad’s running for Congress. We can’t say stupid things in public places.”

Sam pulled into the lot and found a space. They got out and walked to class together.

Chapter End Notes

For anyone wanting to know which Warbler I named Dylan, he’s standing to the right of Sebastian when “Glad You Came” starts. The camera pans right at 0.20 and his face can seen clearly:
https://youtu.be/mRqbyeAoljE
The Congressional race was heating up with just three weeks left before the election. Burt was
gone a lot to political functions, although occasionally he took the whole family along. Coach Sue
had taken to mud slinging as a way to take shots at Burt’s character.

The tension between the Troubletones and the New Directions was heating up as well. It had been
three weeks without Rachel singing in Glee. The only thing worse than her demanding to get to
sing every time they met was to have her sit there doing absolutely nothing. Santana hadn’t had
any trouble getting eight Cheerios to join the Troubletones.

Rather than actually working on songs for Sectionals, which was coming up in six weeks, Mr.
Schue was trying to encourage them to use the friction between the two groups to motivate them to
work harder, which only encouraged the Troubletones since the New Directions weren’t even
working on any pieces so there was nowhere to focus their frustration.

Rather than using frustration as a motivation, Ms. Corcoran pushed Santana to apologize and in
true Santana form, it came out as an insult-laden tirade. Rather than throwing more barbs at
Santana in retaliation, Finn responded genuinely with the insightful idea that perhaps Santana was
so angry all the time because she couldn’t admit to herself and everyone else that she was in love
with Brittany, and that perhaps Brittany didn’t love her back.

A few days later, Burt and Mr. Schue summoned Santana to Coach Sue’s office to show her an
advance copy of the political ad that Reggie Salazar was about to air. Finn’s flash of clarity had
been shared in the wrong location – in public. Reggie’s niece overhead Finn’s moment of
incendiary insight and shared the meaning of it with her uncle. Reggie was going to use the
information against Sue and run an ad outing Santana as a lesbian. She ran out of the room crying.

As soon as Kurt and Sam finished their math midterm exam, Kurt turned his phone back on to
check his messages and found one from Santana. He texted her back and gave her the address of
the doctor’s office where Nick and Jeff had met them all summer. He texted Burt and told him that
due to what had happened, he wouldn’t be able to come in that afternoon because he had more
triage to attempt. Kurt and Sam went their separate ways for their Costume Design and Pottery
classes.

That afternoon after school, Santana grabbed Dave before he could get off the field after football
practice. She told him to get ready quickly because they were going to Findlay. As soon as he was
out of the locker room, she pulled him to her car. “Drive your truck to the WalMart parking lot. I’ll
follow you and you can get in with me.”

After class Sam and Kurt met back up and headed to Findlay. About 15 minutes after they got
there, Santana and Dave showed up. Santana got out and got in the back seat of the Navigator.
Dave followed her and got in the other side.
“What is going on, Santana? You grabbed me like the world is going to end if we didn’t get here ASAP and then you didn’t say anything all the way here.”

“Reggie’s running an ad starting tomorrow outing me as a lesbian.”

“What?” Dave managed to get out. “Isn’t that illegal or something?”

“Burt tried to stop the ad claiming that I’m a high school student and it’s a violation of my privacy, but Reggie’s lawyer countered with the fact that I’m 18 and I’m fair game. So, I have to go home tonight and tell my parents about the ad before they see it on TV tomorrow and I have to tell my abuela sometime this weekend before any of her friends say something to her.”

Kurt asked, “Are you going to tell them the truth?”

“I don’t see what choice I have.”

Kurt asked, “Did you actually come to the conclusion that you’re gay and not bisexual?”

“I’ve been doing A LOT of thinking, trust me. Being with a guy is like eating everyone else’s favorite food. Let’s say soft tacos. Everyone eats tacos and everyone loves tacos and there are Taco Bells and commercials for tacos everywhere. So, you eat a soft taco the first time and you like don’t get the hype AT ALL. It’s gross, not even good, much less great, but if you tell everyone that you don’t like tacos, you’ll get looked at like you’re insane. So, you keep eating tacos. Eventually, you get used to the taste, but you still never like them, but in order to get the best position socially, you know that you have to make everyone think you love tacos, so you become the fucking queen of taco eating, like you enter contests to prove you can eat the most tacos. Eventually, you get to the point where a taco is a taco is a taco. It doesn’t even matter anymore that you love spaghetti. I’m pretty sure that makes me a lesbian and everyone’s going to know tomorrow.”

“That’s a really interesting analogy,” Kurt said. “I found that spaghetti didn’t live up to the hype and passed after the first bite.”

“Yeah, me too,” Sam said. “But your persistence to become the taco queen is top notch.”

All four of them laughed.

“Thanks, Sam,” she said as she rolled her eyes. “You’re a dork, but you’re sweet. I’m sorry I insulted you when I asked you out. You’re a good guy.”

Sam nodded. “You were trying to stay at the top, and I think I’m more of a burrito. I stick out a little too much in a group of soft tacos.”

They all laughed again.

“Shut up, you dork,” she teased.

Kurt said, “If you come out as gay, you being Dave’s beard is shot.”

“I know. I just don’t think I can endure any more lies. I’m sorry, Dave. We had agreed that we would have an amicable break up if either one of us ever decided to end this.”

“Okay. But my parents know we’ve been dating since last March. It’s been nearly seven months. I’m going to have to tell them tonight as well. I’m going to get grilled on how I couldn’t tell you were gay. The guys at school won’t say anything to me. You’ve slept with half of them.” He stopped talking and took a deep breath. “I’m going to tell them that I didn’t know because you and
I haven’t been having sex. That’s what they want to hear anyway. They’re big on purity and waiting until marriage. They know nothing about your rep at school. If they did, they wouldn’t have wanted me to date you.”

“I get that. My parents don’t know either. And my abuela’s probably going to stop speaking to me. She’s super religious like your parents. Anyway, this is our amicable break up. We have to go back to Lima and go home and tell our families before they see that ad.” She reached for the door latch and pulled.

Kurt spoke up, “Santana.”

She stopped before she was all the way out.

“I’m sorry this happened to you.”

“It’s Finn’s idiotic lack of brain to mouth filter that did this to me. Everything was fine until he decided to play teenage shrink in the hallway where people could hear him. I know I’m not a nice person and I know I have anger issues. I know that I’m angry all the time because I can’t be myself. I know who I am and it’s not the person that anyone except Brittany knows, and maybe you three a little bit. But he didn’t have to go all psychoanalyst on me in the hallway. That’s what happened, by the way. I was being a grade A bitch to him about, well, everything. And when I walked away after my biting remarks, he straight up said that I was angry and mean to everyone because I’m too afraid to admit the fact that I’m in love with Brittany. He’s totally right, but where he did it was totally wrong. And now I’m going to … I have to go home.”

“Just a sec,” Kurt said.

“I know this is a disaster, but I’m certain that Finn didn’t mean for this to be the outcome.”

“I know. I know. Don’t go all Mr. Rogers on me and explain things I already know. I’m getting in my car and calming down for a minute before we leave.”

“Wait.” Kurt said emphatically, but still kindly.

She stayed in the seat.

“Sam and I are here for you, if you need anything. I mean that. If something goes wrong this evening, call me. We’ll come get you and your stuff, if you need us to. I know you’re mad at Finn and he lives in the same house we do, but you can sleep in our room. I mean it.”

“I know. If it goes south, I’ll call you. I promise. You have this monstrous SUV and Sam has a truck. I’ll call you if they want me out.”

“We can fit all of your stuff in the family room. You know my dad will let you live with us.”

“I know. I know. I have to go.” She got out.

Once her door was shut, Kurt spoke up again. “This is like us revisiting last fall. You were being awful to me. I was a bitch to you in the locker room. I still don’t know why you chose to kiss me as a way to end my rant, but then I came at you again in the stairwell and pushed you over the edge. I don’t think I ever actually apologized to you, Dave. I am really sorry for bringing Blaine with me last fall and confronting you in public. I can’t say that I know of a better way now than I did then, but probably going to Coach Beiste would have been the best idea. She could have mediated between the two of us. But I know that bringing Blaine and openly confronting you caused everything to escalate.”
“It did. But it was just like popping a blister. The problem, the friction was still there and opening it made it so much worse. Anyway, I know that what you did on the stairway didn’t happen in a bubble. It wasn’t an isolated incident of you trying to out me. It was the reflex of a very scared person who was legitimately afraid that I would do something more violent to you than breaking more bones or kissing you. I have never been afraid of being raped, and I would have never done that to you, so the fear you had of it happening never even occurred to me because I was too busy thinking about what would happen to me if you told someone besides Blaine. But I can imagine that the fear I caused you made your brain bypass its usual logic and you reacted because that’s what happened to me. My absolute terror that you would tell someone else and that my mother would find out caused me to threaten to kill you. I could never kill anyone, but I had to keep you quiet. You were afraid to approach me in private and so you did it in public, not thinking about people overhearing you. I can understand being afraid I would rape you if I got you alone. I had hurt you so badly already. Look, I accept your apology and forgive you. I caused all of that to happen. If I hadn’t bullied you and then outing myself to you, you would have never had a reason to confront me on the stairs. Was it stupid? Yes. Did it scare me to death? Yes. But being awful to people comes back to stab people in the back. I’ll email you. I know that you’re probably being watched around town. I don’t know that anyone has taken to following you out of town, but I won’t risk it. I have to go now before she leaves me here.”

“Don’t forget that Aunt Eunice will take you in, should everything completely tank tonight.”

“I remember.” He pulled the door latch and opened the door. “Thanks for trying to help.” He pushed the door shut and got into Santana’s car.

“God, what a mess!” Kurt said once the door was shut.

“Are you ready to go home? Or is there something around here you want to do?”

“Not really.”

“Trade me places and I’ll drive us back home.”

Kurt nodded.

The next morning when the Troubletones performed for the New Directions, Finn was whispering to Rachel when the Troubletones finished. Santana flew off the handle, jumped down off the stage, and smacked Finn.

The two of them were escorted by Mr. Schue and Ms. Corcoran to see Principal Beiste.

That evening, Burt and Carole were out at a political event. Finn had invited Puck over for an early pizza dinner. Finn and Puck both had to be back at the school at 5:00 for the bus to go to their away game. Kurt and Sam were leaving at 5:00 to drive to Columbus for the evening events at Comic Con.

Finn told Kurt and Sam what had happened in Principal Beiste’s office that morning. He told them that in the end, he claimed that it had been a stage slap to prevent Santana from getting suspended, but in payment for his lie to protect her, he wanted the Troubletones to rejoin the New Directions for the next week. She had agreed.

Then, he brought up his idea for Glee Club the next week. ‘I’m going to plan a ladies’ music week
and sing about female empowerment. I already have this idea for a ballad version of ‘Girls Just Want to Have Fun’. I know how much Madonna’s music inspires girls. I remember from a couple of years ago.”

“No, Finn,” Kurt said with finality in his tone. “Absolutely not.”

“Why not? Santana will love it. She’s all about free love and having fun.”

“That’s not what this is about AT ALL.”

“What do you mean?”

Puck piped in. “You just don’t get it, dude. This is about you saying something really private about Santana in a public place. You just have no idea what it’s like to live with people who don’t accept you or who abandon people. Yeah, Santana said her parents were okay with it. But you took away her right to tell her parents when she was ready to. You’ve done this to people before. You have to start to think about what you say. We all do.”

Kurt said, “We’re not kids anymore, Finn. What you did could affect the whole trajectory of Santana’s life. What about Dave? Her boyfriend? What do you think his parents will say when they see a political ad that names his girlfriend as a lesbian?”

“They weren’t a real couple anyway.”

“There’s no way to know that, now is there? You can’t tell me that you’ve never liked two people at the same time. I know you have. We don’t know what went on between them privately because it’s PRIVATE. For all we know, Mrs. Karofsky’s been picking out table linens for their wedding. We don’t know what his parents do or don’t know. Maybe they don’t even know Santana. Maybe they’ve never met her. Or maybe she has dinner there once a week and Mrs. Karofsky loves her to pieces and pinches her cheeks and tells her how glad she is …” Kurt changed his voice to sound more feminine and imitated a granny voice. ‘that Davey found such a nice girl.’” He switched back to his regular voice. “My point is that there’s no way for you to know the extent of the damage your careless words caused.”

“Fine. No lady music. No Madonna. What do I do then? There’s nothing wrong with Santana liking girls. I just want to show her that we support her.”

“Then let’s have a frank discussion about gossip, rumors, and privacy. Let’s have a serious talk about how, as adults, we are accountable for not only our actions, but also for our words. Santana may have started it, but you escalated a verbal beat down over her perceived flaws in your looks and personality tosmarting back with personal information. Let’s just make up something. Let’s say you still wet the bed.”

“Gross.”

“Doesn’t matter. Let’s just say that it’s true, but only the four of us know it. We’ve kept it to ourselves. But then one day in the hall, you start in on me because you’re mad at me. You start criticizing my clothing choices, my taste in music, how I act girly, and so on. It’s nothing you haven’t said before, but it’s still hurtful. And when you walk away, I say ‘At least I don’t wet the bed like a toddler.’”

“That would be humiliating.”

“Exactly my point. When you said something private that only a few people knew about Santana in a public place, you turned her world on end. Now, imagine if someone knew a way to get a
commercial on TV and in that commercial your bedwetting issue was made known to EVERYONE.”

Sam spoke up. “Remember The Muckraker? Remember personal information about me being made known without my consent? You got grounded back to the Stone Age for just being a small part of that. You OUTED Santana! You didn’t just tell something private like the bedwetting example. You told something that could get her injured or her parents could have thrown her out of her house.”

“Personal accountability,” Kurt said. “That’s what this week needs to be about. If we’re going to spend even more time not practicing for Sectionals, then we should spend it on talking about integrity and personal accountability. Privacy is something everyone values, but people are inherently nosy. We should talk about how those two things work in the adult world.”

“I have no idea how to do that, plus I’m not even sure what it means.”

“Well, I would imagine that when you get back from the game tonight, that Dad and Carole will be having a long talk with you.”

“Oh, great.”

“Sam and I have to go. If there’s any pizza leftover, put it in the fridge. And remember to set the security system when you leave.”

Kurt and Sam talked all the way to Columbus.

“So, when we get back Sunday, do you think that Finn is going to be back at his Flintstones level grounding?”

“Possibly. The rule applied to me and my potential partners, so I don’t know whether Dad and Carole will extend it to Santana or not, but I think even if it’s not Stone-Age level, he’ll be grounded for a while. I don’t think his idea of singing to Santana is completely lame, but not that song. I don’t know what song, but not that one. And plus, that’s not a Madonna song, but I didn’t want to get into another discussion about it. Cyndi Lauper sang it.”

“I don’t really know the words to it, even though I’ve heard it before.”

“It’s about a girl that stays out late and parties and it upsets her parents and they lecture her about her bad life choices and she tells them that she doesn’t want to be held back in a traditional stay-at-home woman and that girls just want to go out and have fun too. Being a lesbian isn’t about being a ‘bad’ girl. Plus, deciding what’s ‘good’ and ‘bad’ is based on a lot more than having sex with a lot of people. If all of the people who have sex all the time are doing it consensually, then it’s not for other people to judge. People going out and having sex with a bunch of people who don’t consent, like guys who intentionally get girls or other guys drunk so they don’t fight back – there’s plenty of reason to speak out against that. Adults targeting children for sex – definitely wrong. But two adults who both want to have sex, that’s no one’s business. The song is catchy, but not really applicable to Santana’s situation. Santana’s abuela isn’t potentially going to disown her because she’s going out and partying, which is a life choice. She’s potentially going to disown Santana over something that is a part of who Santana is. I mean she’s certainly put a lot of effort into finding a guy who rocks her world. If she’s come up empty handed after sleeping with almost all of the good-looking jocks at McKinley, I’m not sure that finding a guy she’s actually attracted to is ever going to happen. This isn’t a case of her not giving guys a fair shot.”
“I’m not sure what a good song would be, but we could look for something.”

“I wish we’d get started on our songs for Sectionals. I feel like we’re just wasting time in there. Rachel’s not participating, and the other girls are gone. Just Tina and Quinn are left and I had to practically beg Quinn. I need to talk to her again. Maybe I can do it in class since Mr. Schue is clearly not focused. At least I got an email from Dave saying that he told his parents that he and Santana broke up and they took it okay. His mother ranted about sneaky gays and it made him even more nervous about her finding out.”

“Speaking of nervous, do you have your applications finished?”

“Mostly. I know we have to send them in. I’m just not feeling very hopeful. We have just over a week to get them done. How are you doing on yours?”

“I actually managed to get the guy who helps me with English to help me with my essay. Not writing it, but proofreading it. I have Miss Pillsbury’s letter about McKinley not helping me last year. I just hope I didn’t totally bomb the SAT when we took it.”

“You didn’t check your scores yet? They were available yesterday online.”

“I know. I’m waiting until after the Con to look at them.”

“Okay. Are your applications finished?”

“Yeah. I just wish there was someone I trusted to look through them. Miss P is nice and all, but she lets the ball drop too often to be completely trusted.”

Their conversation changed topics numerous times before they made it to the convention center. Kurt found a place for them to park, made sure that the Navigator was locked before they walked away. Sam reached out and wrapped his arm around Kurt’s waist and pulled him close. He turned and looked at Kurt, who raised his eyebrow and smiled. Sam leaned in and kissed him.

“This is going to be so much fun.”

Before they made it quite all the way to the entrance, Jeff came barreling at Kurt and threw his arms around him, held tight, and spun him around. “You’re here!”

“I am! Put me down.”

“As you wish.” Jeff stopped spinning and let go of him. “Let’s go inside.”

They picked up their lanyards at the check in table. Kurt grabbed a schedule. Nick picked one up too. The four of them stepped out of the way to look it over.

“I don’t see any changes for tonight,” Kurt said. “Let’s get going.”

They made their way through the crowded vendor area glancing at the different items for sale. Kurt took Sam’s hand and interlaced their fingers. Sam had put his hand brace back on for the evening to make sure that he didn’t get knocked into by people carrying props, so his hand was a little harder to hold, but Kurt did it anyway.

Once they made their way through the room the first time, they headed to the area where the panels were being held. Kurt didn’t know what to expect, but he didn’t really care. He was just happy to be with Sam and to see Sam so excited and enthusiastic. It made him realize just how much the weight of applying to college and not being on the football team was pressing down on
Once everything finished for the evening around 9:00, the four of them headed out to Dylan’s place.

The next morning when they went down to eat breakfast, Kurt pulled out the items that he and Sam had brought with them and he followed the others down. Jeff had Sebastian and Dylan close their eyes when they sat down at the table. Kurt placed a hoodie in front of each of them on the table, face down so the designs couldn’t be seen.

“Open your eyes. They’re belated birthday gifts. Sam and I made one for Jeff and Nick for their birthdays.”

Sebastian reached for his and turned it over. It was a deep red hoodie with the Flash logo painted in a warm deep yellow, giving the whole shirt a vintage feel to go along with the imperfect style of the logo, like it had been worn hundreds of times already.

“You painted it?”

“Sam did the details, I did the base coat on both of them.”

Sebastian slipped it on over his t-shirt. “It’s perfect. Thanks.”

Kurt and Sam both smiled in response.

Dylan picked his up and turned it over. His was deep cobalt with the Doctor Who DW Tardis logo with the light on top painted in white. Sam had given it the same vintage feeling.

“This is great. I was going to buy something today at the Con to wear tomorrow. I didn’t bring any of my fan gear with me. With the strict dress code at Dalton, I didn’t figure I’d have much time to wear it, but since I’ve acquired five good friends since I got here, I spend a lot more time away from the school than I had anticipated. This will be great for the weekends this autumn and winter. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Kurt and Sam ended up saying in unison.

Kurt added, “We can all wear our hoodies tomorrow.”

Dylan picked his up and pulled it on. “It fits perfectly. It’s terrific.”

They ate and went back upstairs to get ready. They left an hour later for the Con wearing their costumes and taking their bags with them. Dylan and Sebastian had decided to join in the fun and dressed up too. Since Dylan already had a pair of white Chucks and they didn’t need wigs, a trip to Goodwill and a little tailoring from Kurt the week before was all they needed.

Sebastian was dressed as Barry Allen. Dylan was dressed as the 10th Doctor. Kurt was Billy Kaplan. Sam was Teddy Altman. Nick was Clark Kent. Jeff was dressed as Oliver Queen. They asked Mr. Haddox take several group photos of them before they left.

After they got there, they split up in pairs to attend the various panels that they wanted to watch. They met back up before lunch to watch the cosplay competition. Never having attended a Con before, Kurt and Sebastian were utterly shocked at the level of detail of the costuming.
After the competition ended, Kurt couldn’t restrain himself from going up to several of the people who had entered and talking to them about the construction of their costumes. He had gone from mildly interested in the events at the Con to suddenly being totally enthralled. They had seen a few people in pretty elaborate costumes, but nothing like what people were wearing for the competition. Kurt looked like a huge fan boy getting photos of people and asking for their email addresses to learn more about the process when they had more time to talk about it.

When the event finished and they had to clear out of the area, Kurt threw his arms around Sam and hugged him. “That was spectacular. I have to talk to those people. I hope they answer me when I email them. When you said people dressed up, I never, ever imagined that. We have to do that sometime – go all out. I don’t know as what, but one day we’re going to do it!”

Sam smiled and leaned forward and kissed him. He pulled him close and spoke quietly in his ear. “You are adorably sexy when you’re excited.”

They had lunch together as a group before they split back up again. Later that afternoon, they met back up to watch Sam, Jeff, Nick, and Dylan compete in a few different trivia rounds. Sebastian and Kurt sat down in the audience to watch.

“This is more fun than I had anticipated, mostly because of watching the rest of you get so hyped up about different aspects of it.”

Kurt elbowed him, but not hard. “Those cosplay costumes were magnificent.”

“They were amazing. I have zero skill in doing that kind of thing, but it’s an art. That’s for sure.”

“I have to come up with an idea for my Costume Design course. We just had our midterms, but I need to get started on my final project. With all of the crazy that seems to surround me, leaving something until the last minute is a really bad idea.”

“Yeah, my dad’s a well-known politician, but not on large scale like running for Congress. But that did play a role in my decision to not play the field I was before.”

“How’s the dating working?”

“It’s working out really well. We get along and the other part is fantastic.”

“Got it. I’ve been doing some reading, but not as much as I had hoped. Maybe we can talk about it more in a couple of weeks. Our early applications are due November 1st, and like I said, we just had our OSU midterms this past week. Once I get through the next week or so, I’ll have more time to look some more stuff up.”

“Ooh. Jeff is up.”

They turned their attention to the start of the trivia rounds. An hour later, all six of them were back together. The four of them hadn’t managed to win, but they all made it into the final round in their categories and won t-shirts and nice stainless keychains.

“Well, that was fun,” Sam said. “Now what?”

“They’re showing Tron in one of the rooms,” Nick said.

“Sure,” Jeff said. “Sounds fun.”

Sebastian and Dylan sat in the row behind Kurt and Sam. Nick and Jeff sat in the row in front of
them. Sebastian leaned up once the lights went down. “Can I borrow your keys for a little while?” He put his hand on Kurt’s shoulder.

Kurt fished his keys out of his pocket and put them in Sebastian’s hand. Sebastian and Dylan quietly left the room.

Sam leaned towards Kurt and asked, “What was that?”

Kurt turned and answered directly in Sam’s ear as quietly as possible. “That was Bas reaching his sci fi saturation point and going out to the Nav to blow Dylan because I have tinted windows and his car does not.”

Sam barely contained the snort. He put his hand around Kurt’s shoulders and propped his arm on the back of Kurt’s chair. By the time the movie was over, Sebastian and Dylan were back.

When the lights came back up, they followed the crowd out. Once they were out in the hallway, they moved away from the crowd to discuss their dinner and evening plans.

Sam asked, “So, Jeff and Nick are heading out to dinner at the place where they have reservations, and then going back to the hotel for the rest of the evening. The four of us are going the hotel to change, and then we’re grabbing something to eat on the way to the club?”

“Yeah, except that we have to get the keycards first,” Kurt said. “So, Nick and Jeff need to follow us there, get a keycard, and then go out to eat.”

The next morning, they slept in until the very latest moment they possibly could and went down to eat breakfast as soon as they woke up. They dressed in their hoodies and jeans, packed up, and headed back to the convention center. They took selfies and photos at the Con again. They all got compliments on their hoodies. They had fun meeting the original Batman and Robin during one of the sessions they went to.

By mid-afternoon, they were all pretty tired and they had seen everything in the vendor area. They left after the last panel. Between Sam’s and Jeff’s penchant for hugging, everyone ended up hugging each other before they got in their cars and went their separate ways.

When Kurt and Sam walked in the door, Burt and Carole were sitting in the living room. Burt was reading a Columbus newspaper and Carole was doing a word puzzle of some sort.

“Hey, boys,” Carole said. “Did you have a good time?”

“It was great!” Sam said enthusiastically.

“The costumes were a-ma-zing!” Kurt added.

Carole saw the twinkle in Kurt’s eye. “Umm hmm. Planning your next outfits?”

“Not yet. Just thinking about planning our next outfits. Some of them were just fantastic. We had a really good time. So did everyone else.”

“Good, good,” Burt said, “Have a seat, you two.”

They sat down. Kurt put their duffle on the floor next to the chair.
“Invite Sebastian and Mark over for dinner sometime soon. Well, I’ll send you a list of available
times and you can see what you can do. Mark and I get along well. It’s just that him moving off to
Columbus and then losing your mom, we just never kept in touch. I lost your mom, but I still had
you. I don’t know. It just felt awkward back then.”

“I’m sure it was. His wife and son were alive, but essentially gone. Let me know when and I’ll see
what I can do.”

“Are things going better for you with Thursdays off?”

“Definitely. And with getting off early Friday this week, I had time to go have fun with everyone.”

“Good, good. I want you to be a kid too. Well, you know what I mean. You’re not a kid. But I want
you to have some fun before you have to be an adult full time.”

Kurt laughed at him. “How the election stuff going?”

“Fine, fine. Just a lot of stuff to learn and read up on. Every time I think I’ve made progress, the
press starts asking me about something else. I’ve had more people ask my opinion on stuff in the
last month than my whole life prior to that.”

Carole spoke up. “We wanted to talk to the two of you. From now until the election, we have to
know everyone who comes into the house. With what happened to Santana, we can’t risk having
someone in here who might go tell the press that we let two gay high school students sleep together
in the same bed every night. You two need to keep your room door locked and keep everyone out
of there. Even seemingly innocuous photos of the two of you studying at your table when there’s
only one bed in the room will get people talking.”

Burt continued, “We’re not going to split you up, but we need to prevent a fire rather than trying to
put one out later. Until further notice, if someone is over here and wants to talk to one or both of
you privately, take them out in the garage or the laundry room, not your bedroom.”

Kurt and Sam nodded.

“That’s fine, Dad. We can do that.”

“Finn’s been grounded until the election.” Burt said. “Puck is still allowed over, but no one else.
We all know that Puck can keep his mouth shut.”

Carole said, “We didn’t take away any of his stuff. He’s just not allowed to spend time anywhere
besides here.”

Kurt said, “I think this may be a good time for you to make an appearance at the school, at least in
Glee. Talk to everyone about the importance of integrity and keeping people’s secrets. I learned the
hard way. Now, Finn is hopefully learning, but this isn’t his first time participating in something
that outed someone. They make us learn useless facts about stuff no one will ever use, but we
never get taught the value of being trustworthy or being a person of integrity.”

“I would, honey, but with the election and having people follow me around, I don’t think I’m the
best choice right now.”

“Actually, I think you might be the best choice right now. You or Dad. Talk about what it’s like to
have people following you around. How different it feels to have every choice you make or every
word you say fall under the scrutinous eyes of the press, but compare it to the fact that people
watch us all the time. That’s why people don’t swear in front of toddlers because toddlers don’t
have any idea when to use certain words. But as older teens, we really need to get this figured out. Rachel’s spying caused Sam a lot of trouble, even though she didn’t mean for it to. Finn’s words caused Santana a lot of trouble, even though he didn’t mean for them to.”

“Alright, honey. I’ll see if I can come with you tomorrow morning and talk to the kids in Glee. I’ll let you know in a little bit. I’ll have to see if someone can cover for me for a few hours or trade me for Thursday morning or something.”

“Thanks. Is that all? We’re pretty tired and we’ve got laundry to do still.”

“That’s it, honey.”

Sam followed Kurt up the stairs and helped him sort the laundry. Kurt ran the whites down and came back up to find Sam in the shower.

Kurt stripped and started to join him. “I thought this was a joint activity?” he asked first.

“Oh, it is. I knew you’d be right back up. Come on in.” Sam pulled him under the water with him as soon as he stepped in and slid the door closed. “Mmm. Wet sexy boyfriend. I like showering with my sexy boyfriend.” Sam kissed him.

“Me too.” Kurt grabbed for Sam’s shampoo and started to wash his hair. “I had a really good time dancing with my sexy boyfriend last night.” Kurt massaged Sam’s scalp and used his sudsy hands to massage Sam’s shoulders too.

“Mmm. That feels good.”

“I’m glad.” Kurt stopped massaging long enough for Sam to turn and rinse. Once his hair was soap free, Kurt stepped closer and kissed him.

Sam took the opportunity to wrap his arms around Kurt and trade places. He washed Kurt’s hair first. “I had a great time this whole weekend.”

They finished showering quickly and put pajamas on.

Kurt asked, “Can you take the dark load down and put it in? I need to talk to Finn.”

“Yeah, sure.”

Kurt went down to Finn’s room and knocked on the door.

“Come in.”

Kurt opened the door and stepped inside.

“Oh, hey, Kurt. Come on in.”

Kurt closed the door and sat in Finn’s desk chair. “I came up with a song. Brittany’s going to sing it. I’m going to sing back-up harmony for her and Sam’s going to play his guitar. We worked it all out on the drive back from Columbus. You can play the drums for us.”

“Yeah, sure. What song?”
‘Perfect’ by P!nk.

That has the ‘F’ word like every line.

We’re singing the radio-approved version. No swearing.

Okay. So, I’m grounded, but they didn’t take my stuff. Puck can come over still.”

Kurt nodded. “I know you didn’t mean to hurt Santana. She knows too, but it doesn’t change the outcome.”

“She’s so mean sometimes.”

“She is. She was also hiding something. It’s really hard to hide something like that. Really think about it, Finn. Think about it. She propositioned you and lots of other guys. She did that to keep her reputation. Think about the reverse like I’ve asked you to do before. Ready to think hard?”

“Yeah. I’m listening.”

“So, you’re the Finn Hudson who lives in an alternate world where 90% of the people are gay. But you’re still straight.”

“Okay.”

“If anyone finds out that you like girls, you could be beaten up, kicked out of your house, or not be able to get a job in your chosen field.”

“Got it. No one can know.”

“But it’s really hard not to look at cute girls in short skirts. It’s really hard to ignore it when they smile at you, even if they’re just being friendly. But you can’t let anyone know. How do you keep them from knowing?”

“I, um, look the other way.”

“Ah, but purposefully ignoring them is something that people can notice.”

“Oh, right. I’d look around and see how the other guys act and try to act like them.”

“Okay. That’s one way, but what happens when a cute guy approaches you and wants to date you. He tells you how hot you are and how you could be the top man with him, if you go out with him.”

“Ugh, gross. No offense, but yuck.”

“He runs his hands down your back. He puts his hand around your waist and pulls you close. Kisses you on the cheek.”

“UGH. Stop!”

“If the hottest guy in school is flirting with you and you act like that, everyone will figure out that something is going on. Rumors will start immediately. You have to go along with it or everyone will find out.”

“This makes me feel sick.”

“Now, consider that you were only 12 years old when that started. Now, you’re 18. Six whole
years you have pretended to be gay. You’ve slept with countless guys just to keep people from figuring out that you’re not gay. You’ve mastered the art of pretending to enjoy gay sex just to keep people from finding out that you aren’t gay.”

Finn looked like he was going to be sick.

“Are you going to have the personality of Rainbow Brite?”

“I get it. She acts like a bitch because she’s miserable. I already knew that, but I never really thought what it would be like to be in her position. I need to learn how to do that for myself.”

“What?”

“How to think through something the way someone else might.”

“Tell your mom. I’m sure there are things you can do to get better at it. Santana spent years building a reputation for herself as HBIC and a single sentence from you in the hallway destroyed six years of work. Remember that night my dad threw you out?”

“Yeah. That felt awful.” Finn closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “My heart was racing and I felt so upset.”

“Keep that feeling where you can access it every time you think of opening your mouth and telling something personal and private about someone to somebody else. Gossip and mud-slinging in an argument may seem like fun and it might even feel good when the person has done something mean to you, but remember that awful feeling to help you remember not to share private information about people.”

“I’ll try. That’s a good idea.”

“Your mom is going to come to school and talk to everyone. I asked her to. She’s a smart lady. You should listen to her more.”

Finn laughed. “Yeah. Sometimes I just feel like everyone else’s brain works differently than mine. I feel like everyone has super computers and I have a bunch of post-it notes. All of the post-it notes have really important information on them. I just can’t ever find the one I’m looking for when I need it.”

“Tell your mom that. Let her get you some help. There’s no shame in helping yourself. Really. Admitting that something is hard is the key to getting better at it. If you never try to find someone to help you, things won’t change. There are experts at pretty much everything. Let one of them help you figure out how to scan your post-it notes and store them in your computer so you can pull the information up when you need it.”

Finn laughed again. “I’ll do that. Are we going to practice the song?”

“Nope. It’s just going to be spontaneous and heartfelt. We’re not making a record, just trying to support Santana.”

“Got it.”

“I need to get back to my chores and stuff.” Kurt got up and left.
When he went back in to their room, Sam was reading a comic book. “Relaxing, I see.” Kurt shut and locked the door.

“It would be more relaxing if you were lying on me or at least near me.”

“Is that so?”

“Mmm hmm.” He patted the bed.

“I’m going to go grab the whites out of the dryer first. I’ll just hang the darks up on the racks. We can toss our jeans in the dryer to soften them up tomorrow or something. I’m a lot more tired than I thought I was. I just want to undress and get in bed with you and snuggle until we fall asleep.”

“Sounds perfect. I’ll be ready when you get back.”

When Kurt came back upstairs, Sam had the lights off, the nightlights on, soft music playing, and he was under the covers instead of on top like he had been when Kurt left. Kurt put the basket of clean clothes on the floor near the dresser, and went back and locked the door. He undressed and left his pajamas on the end of the dresser and got in bed. Sam wiggled out of his pajama pants and dropped them on the floor. He scooted up to Kurt and put his head on Kurt’s chest. Kurt rearranged a bit and wrapped his arm around Sam’s shoulders. He kissed the of Sam’s head.

“I looked at my scores while you were gone.”

“Okay.”

“They weren’t great, but they weren’t awful.”

“Good. Do you feel more relaxed now?”

“I guess I’m glad that they weren’t awful, but they weren’t good enough to make me confident that I can get in anywhere considering that my GPA isn’t at the level any of the places we are applying will consider to be good enough to get in.”

“But you have the letter from Miss Pillsbury and your GPA from Tennessee was much higher.”

“I know. I just don’t feel confident, but it could have been worse.”

“If you don’t get in anywhere, what will you do?”

“Same thing I told you the last time. Move with you to wherever you decide to go. I’ll start taking classes and pay for them myself. I’ll just take the specific ones I need to take to learn to do what I want to do.”

“I was reading the requirements about housing again carefully. With as many credits as I’ll have, I think I might be able to fight the requirement to live on campus. I can at least try.”

“Okay.” He took a deep breath and let it out. He buried his nose in Kurt’s neck and placed small kisses on his neck.

“Mmm.”

Kurt’s phone rang, making both of them jump. He reached out and grabbed it and answered.

“What’s up, Jeff?” Kurt put him on speaker.
“What kind of crazy school is McKinley?”

“Umm, all kinds of crazy, but less so than last year, at least for me. Why?”

“Well, when we got back, we unpacked, got some stuff organized, and a little later, Blaine knocked on our door.”

“ Weird, but okay.”

“He propositioned me and Nick. Obviously word got back to him that the two of us came out when the school year started.”

“Propositioned?”

“Yeah. We weren’t the first either. He went to Sebastian first. We found that out after we turned him down.”

“I told him to see Josh, if that’s what he really wanted.”

“I don’t know Josh.”

“That’s because he’s not a Warbler, but he’s Dalton’s biggest reliever of curious guys’ curiosity. I never talked about him because he’s not a personal friend of mine, but I’ve heard about him freshman year. He’s a senior.”

“By reliever of curiosity, you mean he’s willing to have sex with guys who are exploring their sexuality.”

“Exactly.”

“What does this have to do with McKinley, which is what you led with when you called.”

“Oh, yeah. Blaine told us that his director told him and Rachel that they weren’t performing like two people who had been sexually awakened or something like that. He encouraged them to explore that to do a better job of portraying a couple in love.”

“No way.”

Sam said, “Oh, my God. So Blaine’s out looking for someone to have sex with so he can be a better actor in a high school play?”

“That’s just insane,” Kurt interjected. “I mean if he wants to have sex, I’m not going to try to stop him. He’s 17, and if he’s decided that’s something he wants to do, then fine, but having it suggested to him by his director is absolutely wrong. Obviously, Sebastian turned him down as well.”

“Yeah. He and Dylan are exclusive. Everyone knows that. Well, I guess except Blaine since he hadn’t met Dylan. When Blaine met Sebastian back when he came to tell us about getting the lead, Sebastian and Dylan weren’t dating yet. I don’t think he even met Dylan that day.”

Kurt didn’t say anything for close to a minute. “I just don’t know what to say. It’s nuts.”

“I just thought someone should know and do something about it, maybe, somehow? I don’t know. I didn’t ask any more questions after I got that answer because I just didn’t know what to say other than telling him I thought that it wasn’t a very good reason to do it. Maybe I shouldn’t have told him about Josh.”
“Well, he’s 17. He can make up his own mind. And if Josh has a good reputation for deflowering curious guys, I guess that makes him good at what he does.”

“I’ve never heard anyone disappointed. And he has a returning fan base, for lack of a better word.”

“Why didn’t Blaine already know about Josh if you did?”

“Maybe he’s only well-known amongst the jocks? I’m not actually sure. He’s on the soccer team with me. That’s how I found out. I told Nick, but we’ve never told anyone else because no one ever came to us asking about that kind of thing probably because we were in the closet. Blaine never played any sports or spent any time with the jocks.”

“I’m going to hang up. I can’t think of anything else to say.”

“Yeah.”

Kurt saw that he had missed a text when he was out of the room earlier. He read it. Carole would be going with them in the morning. He put his phone back and got comfortable with Sam snuggled up on him again. “I want to ask you something.”

“Sure.”

“Are you sexually fulfilled in our relationship? Are you disappointed or upset that we haven’t had sex?”

“That was technically three questions.” He scooted back a little bit. “Roll over and face me.” He gave Kurt time to turn over and get comfortable. He leaned forward and kissed Kurt gently and then put his head back down on his pillow. “I am sexually satisfied. I am not disappointed or upset.”

“You’re sure.”

“I’m positive. I think I’ve probably done more looking into stuff than you have, despite my dyslexia. I mean what does ‘having sex’ mean? To most people, meaning straight people, having sex means a penis in a vagina. But why is the word sex part of the phrase ‘oral sex’. I mean I know a lot of people say ‘blow job’ or something instead of ‘oral sex’, but it is definitely a type of penetration, isn’t it. I mean part of me is inside part of you or the other way around. It ends with an orgasm, so to me it’s sex. Us getting undressed and rubbing up against each other ends in us orgasming. Isn’t that some kind of sex? And hand jobs? Again, we both end up orgasming. Doesn’t that make it some type of sex? I read these statistics that said 25% of older gay men reported to never having had anal sex ever. And somewhere else I read that even guys who do, only do it 40% of the time they have sex or something like that. I’m not the best at math, but that says to me that there’s a whole bunch of gay guys out there having other types of sex and anal isn’t the end-all-be-all of being gay. If I never have anal sex, I will still be gay. I don’t need you to be willing to have anal sex with me to prove to me that you love me or that we’re a real couple or whatever it might be that you’re thinking that I’ll think if we never have anal sex.”

“Really?”

“Really which part? I just said a lot of things.” Sam leaned forward and kissed him again.

“The part about if I never wanted to do it, you would be okay with that.”

“Well, yeah. Think about this. We have anal sex, both ways. There are 8 possible outcomes.” He listed them. “So, there’s a one in four chance we’ll both like it if I top and you bottom and there’s a
one in four chance that we’ll both like it if you top and I bottom. But that still leaves a three in four chance we won’t end up both liking it no matter which way we do it. Or maybe I didn’t do the permutations right, but whether I did or didn’t, it’s not a given that either one of us or both of us will like it no matter which way we do it. We both definitely enjoy blowing each other, we enjoy giving each other hand jobs, and we both enjoy rubbing off on each other. That’s three ways of having sex we already enjoy. I don’t need another type of sex to be happy with you. We don’t even ever have to try anything else. Or we can some time if we both want to. I love you and I love having sex with you whether we are using our mouths or our hands or our bodies.” Sam ran his hand down Kurt’s face and ran his thumb across Kurt’s lips. “Kurt?”

“So, you’re not going to break up with me sometime if I don’t ever want to try?”

“Nope. Are you going to break up with me if I don’t want to try it?”

“Of course not.”

“That’s how I feel. I still feel like you have it stuck in your head somewhere that you’re a prudish girl, which is exactly what you told me that you weren’t the first time we showered together.”

“You remember that?”

“Umm, seeing my gorgeous boyfriend in the shower naked? Yeah, I remember. You were afraid that I wouldn’t think you’re attractive, but you were already attractive and seeing you with your clothes off only made you more attractive.”

“I thought I had moved past this, but in talking to Bas, I’ve come to realize some things.”

“What things? You were talking to Sebastian about sex?”

“Not exactly. Not in a personal or descriptive way, as in the actual act of having sex. We were talking about attraction and picking partners and stuff. You heard what he said about why he got sent to live with his dad. I’ve just had a lifetime of living in a place where sex is a dirty word unless you’re married. It’s like everyone is supposed to think it’s wrong and inappropriate, but presto, the day you get married, suddenly it’s fine to think about. Yet pretty much every ad that targets men uses sexy women to sell the product. Or sexy men wear the product and successfully get the attention of sexy women by doing it. So, there’s this weird thing going on with the whole issue.”

“I get that. I grew up in a place where sex was for married people.”

“But Sebastian didn’t have that puritanical influence in his childhood. He has a very sex positive attitude. He likes sex and is all for having sex. I don’t know what the age of consent is in France, but he never gave me the impression that he was breaking any laws. He talked about how seeing a good-looking guy makes him feel things about the guy.”

“Sexual things.”

“Yes. That seeing a hot guy gets him turned on.”

“Okay.”

“And I realized that I’m the one that’s different. He talked about asexuality and it being a spectrum and I honestly thought that being asexual meant that you were not into guys or girls – like I figured priests and monks were asexual and the old spinster relative that never got married. So, I looked stuff up. I read about romantic attraction and sexual attraction. Anyway, they aren’t the same thing. Like someone can be 100% romantically attracted to someone, but not sexually attracted at all. And
people can be 100% sexually attracted to someone and not be interested in them romantically at all.”

“Alright.”

“So, anyway in talking to him, I realized that I’ve never been sexually attracted to someone I wasn’t romantically interested in, which really explains my total lack of interest in porn and why it makes no sense to me.”

“So, seeing a naked guy doesn’t turn you on?”

“No, not really. I mean I can admire their physiques and enjoy looking at them, but it doesn’t cause me to want to go over to them and get undressed and have my way with them.”

“Alright.”

“So, this revelation helped me figure out why the guys at school were so afraid of me. Guys who want to have sex with every good-looking girl they see think I’m the same way. And guys who ignore what girls say and who push them into giving in to the guys’ desires see themselves and their actions as a probability from me. They see me as a predator because they themselves are predators. They can’t see a good-looking girl without wanting to stick their dicks in her, so they see me as a gay guy who wants to stick my dick in them. I was never attracted to any of them, so I couldn’t figure out why they thought I was perving on them. They can’t imagine not perving on girls 24/7, so they couldn’t see that I wasn’t a threat.”

“Interesting assessment. So, you’ve decided that you’re asexual?”

“No really. There was this subtype listed called ‘gray asexual’ or was it ‘demi sexual’? It’s someone who is only sexually attracted to someone they share an emotional bond with or who they’re romantically attracted to.”

“So, I fall in that category?”

Kurt laughed and leaned forward and kissed Sam. “Most definitely. I liked you from the get-go. I thought you were cute and funny and there was just something about you that was different, even though you were in the closet. When I thought you were straight, I wanted to be your friend and I can’t say that about many people. All of the ideas I’ve ever had that got me sexually excited all revolved around romantic things. Holding hands, dancing, spending time together. None of them ever revolved around a guy propositioning me or doing a strip-tease for me.”

“So, me stripping for you wouldn’t get you turned on?”

“Oh, it would. It definitely does. But let’s say that Puck came in here and started stripping to sexy music, I’d cover my eyes or pull the covers up over my face.”

“Okay.”

Kurt scooted closer, closing the gap between them. “I think you are so hot and super sexy and I have a hard time keeping my hands to myself whenever you’re within my reach. I’ve learned that I actually love being touched by you. But the thought of getting one of those massages you see in movies, where you get undressed and lie on a table and some person comes out with oil and rubs you down – no thanks. That sounds like a nightmare. Now, if you want to do that to me, just say the word and I’ll put a couple of towels on the bed and strip down in a heartbeat.”

Sam kissed him. “I’ll keep that in mind.”
“Until I read that stuff, I always just thought I was leery of being touched because no one had ever touched me kindly, but I think that just part of it. I think the rest of it is just me. And I think the uncertainty came in again when I realized that there might not ever come a time when I am interested in going ‘all the way’. And I got scared that you’d leave me once you waited however long was a reasonable amount of time and I still didn’t want to do it. I think before I read all of that stuff, my underlying assumption was that I would eventually want to, but what if I don’t? I love you so much and it would break my heart to lose you, but it would hurt me even more to know that you stayed with me and you were unhappy and not fulfilled. I’d rather let you go as much as it would break my heart. You deserve someone who can give you what you need to be happy and fulfilled.”

“I get that about you. You wanted us to be friends when we first met, and you were already putting my best interest first when you backed out of the duet. I know that you would rather me be happy than somehow be the cause of my unhappiness. And I appreciate you considering my feelings in all of this and asking me about it rather than just making assumptions about it. Am I curious about what it would be like? Sure. Is it so important to me that I would give you up to have it? Definitely not.”

“You say that now because you’re answering on the spot, but I want you to really think about it for a while, okay? It’s easy to say that something you’ve never done isn’t that important, but really think about, please.”

“I will. I promise.”

“So, reading all of that stuff made me call into question all of the ideas I’ve had about promiscuity and sex. Being brought up in an area that teaches that sex outside of marriage is a sin puts sex in an ‘off limits’ zone. So, people who engage in off limits behaviors are ‘bad’. But what if we remove the off-limits qualification and we move it to a purely legal standpoint. The age of consent is 16. So, if we move everyone 16 and up who is having sex into the realm of it being okay and not off limits, then is having sex wrong? If the girls do something to prevent pregnancy like birth control pills or those shots, and the guys all use condoms only with girls that are preventing pregnancy themselves, why is it wrong? Everyone uses sex to sell everything, but then society vilifies people who act on their sexual urges and I mean consensually. Every time I say ‘have sex’, I mean that both parties are willing and interested. So, everyone knows that people are sex driven. Even toothpaste ads are sexy. It’s just this weird dichotomy. We use people’s sex drive to get them to buy toothpaste, but shun them for having sex freely. I’m not asking for an answer. I’ve just been thinking a lot. Why do I not feel that urge to jump guys that most guys seem to have about getting a girl in bed? Learning that there are other people like me is weird. On the one hand, it’s a relief to know that I’m not alone, but on the other hand it’s this letdown knowing that I might never be ‘normal’ even amongst gay guys.”

“Listen, okay? You keep doing your thinking. Think as much as you want about sexuality, sex drive, chastity culture, and whatever.” Sam kissed him. “But don’t let all of your thinking convince you that I don’t love you just the way you are. I like you as a person. You’re my best friend. We talk about everything. I think you’re amazing. You’re not abnormal. There’s no such thing as normal. There’s a point on some diagram that is in the center of everything somehow and we’ve decided to call that particular point ‘normal’, but no one fits the definition of normal on every topic. Normal is just the most common answer to a particular question, and the more questions someone answers like everyone else, the more ‘normal’ that person is. But no one is completely ‘normal’. Think all you want, but just know that I didn’t fall in love with you because you’re ‘normal’. I fell in love with you because you’re you.” Sam wrapped his hand behind Kurt’s neck and gently pulled his face closer and kissed him gently. He pressed in to see Kurt’s response and Kurt licked at his lower lip and Sam opened and they explored familiar territory, letting themselves
go in their mutual pleasure. When the broke for air, Sam kissed along Kurt’s jaw to his ear, and then down to his neck. “I know you told me to think about it more, but I don’t need to. I want to be with you. Way back, I said I wanted to keep you and you said I could. I intend to hold you to that. I love you and I don’t need you to do something else just to prove to me that you love me. I’m completely satisfied the way things are.”

Kurt kissed Sam’s forehead. “Look up.”

Sam moved back just enough that he could look into Kurt’s eyes.

“Promise me that if you ever change your mind and that you feel like you need that to be satisfied that you’ll tell me and you’ll give me the chance to provide it for you. That you’ll at least give me the chance, even if it’s not something I really want to do, before you leave me for someone else.”

“I have no intention of breaking up with you, but yes, I promise. If I ever become convinced that I really have sex that way to be happy, I’ll give you a chance to provide me with it or whatever the right expression is. I won’t cheat on you to get it.”

“Thank you. Maybe one day we’ll look back on my freak out and laugh, but I just want to be honest with you. I know we’re young and still learning things about ourselves. Maybe I will still grow into having the urge to do that. I mean I don’t even shave still. Maybe there are more hormones that come into play later in puberty. I don’t know. All that stuff left me wondering about how you would react if never feel drawn to do that.”

“Well now you know. I’m glad you shared your concerns with me. I always am. I can’t even explain how much it means to me that you trust me. You know I trust you too, right?”

“Mmm hmm.” He kissed Sam. “You are the most amazing boyfriend ever. I’m so glad you’re a part of my life. I had a lot of fun this weekend.”

“Me too. Let’s get comfortable. I’m ready to snuggle and sleep.”

“I’ll meet you at the parking lot entrance at 7:55,” Kurt said to Carole on his way out the door as he and Sam left to get to school early.

When they got to Principal Beiste’s office, they sat in the waiting area. Her secretary called her to let her know that she had students who wanted to see her. Once she got there, she let them into her office. They sat down and waited for her to sit down before anyone said anything.

“What can I do for you boys this morning?”

“I need to know if I can speak completely off the record or whatever it would be called,” Kurt said.

“Why?”

“I found out something about a student, but I don’t want the student to know that I am the one that came to you about the issue.”

“This isn’t just gossip is it?”

“No.”

“Alright then, I’ll fill out an anonymous action form if needed. I will leave your names off.”
“Artie told Rachel and Blaine that they weren’t portraying a couple in love well enough and that they didn’t seem to have enough experience to portray the roles or something along those lines.”

“So, you didn’t hear this first hand?”

“No.”

“So, it is a rumor.”

“Not exactly. Blaine went to Dalton looking for someone willing to hook up with him in order to explore his sexuality. I’m friends with the three people he propositioned.”

“I see. So, he went to three openly gay guys in hopes that one of them would have sex with him?”

“Yes.”

“And Rachel?”

“I’m not sure who she’d go to, but if I had to place a bet, I’d say Puck because she’s gone to him before to cheat on Finn. But I have no proof. I can ask him if you want.”

“That won’t be necessary. We’re on the brink of cutting the production anyway because after factoring the cost of everything that’s still needed when we looked through what we have, it’s going to take a couple thousand dollars to put the show on. Will is going to talk to the club today about potential ways to raise the money needed. Sue’s refusing to budge on helping with the funding.”

“Of course, she is. I don’t know what to say about that other than we usually come up with ways to get the money we need, so I don’t see that as anything but another hurdle. But you wouldn’t redo the election when you know that I was the rightful winner because I said something to Rachel about how JFK won the election in Chicago decades ago. Despite the fact that I did not ask her to intervene or suggest that she do so, I said something that could have been misconstrued as doing such. And now Artie has actually suggested that a 16 year old and a 17 year old have sex so that they can better portray characters in a play. I expect your stand on suggesting inappropriate behavior to be equally enforced for that.”

“Thanks for coming in. I have to figure out how to deal with this.”

Kurt and Sam went to the parking lot entrance to wait for Carole. Once she arrived, they walked with her to the choir room. She sat down with them in the back row and waited for everyone else. Right before the bell rang, Ms. Corcoran and the Troubletones came in. They mostly sat together.

Mr. Schue came in and got everyone to quiet down. He gave Santana the floor.

“I went to my abuela’s house this weekend to tell her and she threw me out. She won’t speak to me. It’s as if I died.” She wiped her eyes in an effort to keep tears from falling.

Finn piped up. “What about all that mean stuff you said in the hallway about her?”

Santana rolled her eyes. “I made it up, Grimace. My abuela called me ‘mi amor’, which means my love. And now I’m dead to her. My parents really do seem to be okay about it, but I lost my abuela.” She couldn’t talk anymore and sat down with Brittany.
Mr. Schue moved back to the center. “Mrs. Hudson-Hummel is here to talk to everyone for a few minutes.”

Carole got up and stood in front of the piano. “Kurt asked me to come. I’m not really much of a public speaker, but he wanted me to talk to you about some things he says no one here at school teaches. You’ve all dealt with rumors at some point in your lives. But rumors in adult life can damage a lot more than just your reputation with a few people. Finn found out this week that saying something private about someone in the wrong setting can turn that person’s world upside down. But the truth is that he should have learned that last spring with the issues surrounding *The Muckraker.*”

One of the Cheerios said, “But Coach Sue said all of that stuff was a lie.”

“I know, but I’m referring to how rumors, whether true or false, can literally ruin someone’s life. What if Santana’s parents had reacted the way her grandmother did? What if they had thrown her out?”

“Why would people do that?” one of the girls asked.

Quinn spoke up. “Because they’re hypocrites. My dad threw me out when he found out that I was pregnant. How is that ‘Christian’ of him? Help the widows and the poor. Love your neighbor as you love yourself, but throw your own 15-year old child out of the house?”

Carole tried to refocus the discussion. “How many of you value your privacy? Raise your hands.”

Everyone’s hands went up.

“How many of you are nosy and like to know things about other people that they may not want other people to know? Don’t raise your hands because I know the answer is pretty much everyone. Humans are nosy by nature. We love a good gossip story. But weigh those two things against each other. What if every time you spread gossip about someone, another person spreads gossip about you?” She looked around. “Everyone loves throwing the softball at the target on the dunk tank, but there aren’t a lot of people lining up to sit in the dunk tank. It’s all fun and games to talk about people behind their backs, but no one wants to be the topic of other people’s gossip. The only way for it to stop is for you to stop. It’s as simple as that. Be trustworthy people. If someone comes to you with a problem or private information and wants to share that with you and trusts you enough to be there for them or to help them solve the problem, then BE TRUSTWORTHY. Don’t go run off to someone else and share that information with other people.”

“What if someone tells you something really bad?” one of the girls asked.

“If someone tells you something dangerous, then it’s best to go to a trusted ADULT and get help. Very rarely would someone your own age have the ability to help you with a dangerous or really bad situation. And if any of you don’t have a trusted adult, I’d be glad to volunteer. I would take any of you in, even if I don’t know you personally. Come to me and I’ll help you. But you all have to stop hurting each other. Each day you take one step closer to adulthood. As adults, people actually get sued for things like defamation of character, which is basically saying things that affect someone’s livelihood in negative way. Slander, liable, defamation of character, inciting riots, and inciting people to commit crimes – these are things that people do with the words they say. People want to say that it’s a free country and they can say whatever they want, but that’s not entirely true. I’d like to leave that as a sort of assignment that maybe Miss Pillsbury, Mr. Schuester and Ms. ….” She looked toward Ms. Corcoran.

“Corcoran.”
“And Ms. Corcoran can talk about with everyone after you’ve taken time to learn what is and isn’t legally allowed as free speech. Maybe a follow-up discussion can be about what things are legal to say, but not really appropriate.” She thanked Mr. Schue quietly for letting her speak, and left to go to work.

Before Mr. Schue could start to speak again, Coach Beiste appeared in the doorway and asked for Artie to follow her to her office. About 15 minutes later, nothing useful had happened in class when Artie came back. It was a déjà vu moment from when Rachel had walked in a few weeks earlier.

“I’ve been suspended for a week, and I’ve been removed as the student director for the play.”

“Wait, what?” Rachel said. “Why would you be suspended and removed as director?”

“I said something I shouldn’t have. Like Finn. Like other people. But as the student director, my place was one of leadership and what I said was inappropriate for my position. It’s like what Finn’s mom was talking about. We have the freedom to say things, but what we can say as individuals is different from what we can say as the representative of something, like the school in this case. I’m not going to talk about this further because repeating what I said would just repeat the reason I’m in trouble. I’ll see you all next week. My dad’s on his way here to pick me up now.”
After everyone in the room got over the shock of Artie’s announcement, Kurt nudged Brittany, who got up and stood at the front of the room. She grabbed one of the stools and put it in front of the piano.

“Santana, will you come sit on the stool? I have a song I want to sing for you.”

Santana looked confused, but she never could refuse Brittany, so she got up and sat on the stool.

Kurt, Sam, and Finn got up and took their places by the band. This song wasn’t about them or from them. It was all Brittany. Sam strummed the first chord and Brittany began to sing. They had decided to end the song early and not do the rap and the repeats of the chorus.

Made a wrong turn, once or twice  
Dug my way out, blood and fire.  
Bad decisions, that’s alright.  
Welcome to my silly life.

Mistreated, misplaced, misunderstood  
Miss “No way, it’s all good”. It didn’t slow me down.  
Miss “No way, it’s all good”. It didn’t slow me down.  
Mistaken, always second guessing,  
Underestimated. Look, I’m still around.

Pretty, pretty please, don’t you ever, ever feel  
Like you’re less than, less than perfect.  
Pretty, pretty please, if you ever, ever feel  
Like you’re nothing. You’re perfect to me.

You’re so mean, when talk  
about yourself. You are wrong.  
Change the voices in your head.  
Make them like you instead.

So complicated! Look how big you’ll make it.  
Filled with so much hatred, such a tired game.  
It’s enough! I’ve done all I can think of.  
Chased down all my demons. I’ll see you do the same.

Pretty, pretty please, don’t you ever, ever feel  
Like you’re less than, less than perfect.  
Pretty, pretty please, if you ever, ever feel  
Like you’re nothing. You’re perfect to me.

As soon as Brittany finished singing she wrapped her arms around Santana and pulled her into a tight hug. Tears were streaming down both their faces. Brittany took Santana by the hand and led her out of the classroom. Ms. Corcoran picked up their bags and led the rest of the Troubletones back to the classroom they usually met in.

Mr. Schue passed out some sheet music and went back to working on their sight reading skills. Rachel was still not really participating, so Kurt had little choice but to take her place and sing first soprano, with Tina on second soprano and Quinn singing alto.
When the bell rang, Kurt’s first words to Sam were, “We have to find some more girls or quit doing those six-part harmony songs.”

Sam leaned toward him and kissed him. “Let’s get out of here.”

After talking to Burt, Kurt spent a couple of hours on Tuesday procuring the funding the musical needed from the three funeral homes in Lima. Burt met with the three directors and brought them to the school after first period to meet with Principal Beiste. They gave her a check to fund the entire musical.

On Wednesday and Friday, the two groups met together and worked on learning more about freedom of speech, using that freedom wisely and responsibly, and how even telling the truth can be a rumor. Ms. Corcoran took Carole’s suggestion very seriously and created actual lesson plans. In the end, they spent the nearly four hours of class time on the topic.

Since Sam’s glass blowing class had ended the week before Comic Con, it was the first Saturday in a long time that Kurt and Sam didn’t need to drive out of town for something early in the morning. Sam was standing behind Kurt with his hands on Kurt’s shoulders gently running his fingers along his upper back and neck, as Kurt carefully read through a list of requirements on his laptop.

“Okay, so the instructions say that I have to use one garment making only minor adjustments to make it fit the model properly. The second requirement is to alter an existing piece significantly, with an explanation of what that means. And the third requirement is to make one piece entirely from scratch, creating my own pattern or combining multiple existing patterns into a single pattern.”

“Alright.”

“And then there’s a bunch of rules about different types of stitches, seams, piecing techniques, and stuff that have to be included. And footwear isn’t graded.”

“So…?”

“So, I’ve decided to turn you into Mal.”

“Seriously?”

“Unless you don’t want me to.”

“Oh, my God! Of course I do. Yes, yes, yes!! A million times yes!” Sam leaned over and kissed Kurt.

Carole knocked on the door that was open. “What’s so incredibly exciting? You sound like you won the lottery.”

“Not quite, but Kurt’s going to make me a Malcolm Reynolds costume.”

“You mean from that space cowboy show… um, Firefly.”
“That’s the one.”

“The cool brown duster that he wears?”

“Exactly.”

“I see why you’re excited. That’s a very nice looking outfit. Very rugged,” she teased just slightly. Kurt laughed. “It’s going to look amazing on him. I mean, Nathan Fillion’s a good-looking guy and all, but it will look much better on Sam.”

Carole just nodded her head and smiled. “I’m sure. I came up to tell you that Rachel’s here to see you. I texted you a couple of times, but you didn’t answer.”

“Oh, sorry. My phone is charging. I’ll come down.”

Carole walked away from the doorway.

Kurt stood up. “Maybe you can start looking for the best photos that show off his shirt, his pants, and the coat.” He reached up and put his hands on side of Sam’s neck and leaned in and kissed him gently. “I love you.” He ran his right thumb down Sam’s cheek. “Maybe you can look for where we can get the boots. Not necessarily right away because I’m sure they’re expensive, but if we can’t find any that are affordable, maybe we can work on making really tall spats and find some brown shoes to attach them to make them look like boots.” Kurt kissed him again. He grabbed his partially charged phone and headed downstairs.

“Rachel?”

“Hey, Kurt.”

“Let’s go downstairs. No one’s down there.” He opened the door and let her start down the stairs first. He closed the door behind him. He sat down on the opposite end of the couch and turned sideways and sat criss-cross facing her.

She took her shoes off and pulled her feet up onto the couch. “I did it again. I know.”

“Did what?”

“Exactly what everyone didn’t want me to do. Last spring, I apologized and I listened and I heard what everyone said about how they didn’t dislike me, but they disliked my diva attitude. We sat in this very room before you even considered the possibility being able to come to New York with us and we talked about it. And then school started and I did the very same thing, but worse.”

Kurt just let her talk.

“I spent all summer with Blaine performing and feeling like I was so important. He and I were the leads for a tribute to Broadway show. We got to sing all of the big songs from the biggest Broadway shows all summer. It made me feel like a star. I came back to Lima and everything felt so small after spending the summer in Chicago.”

Kurt just nodded.

“I never did even ask what you did this summer.”
“Do you really want to know or are you just trying to be polite by asking?”

“I do want to know.”

“Alright. Give me a second.” Kurt got up and put the DVD from *West Side Story* in and pressed play after he sat back down.

After “Tonight” finished, Rachel said, “Stop. Press pause.”

Kurt stopped the DVD.

“Where did you do this?”

“Toledo.”

“And the girl?”

“That’s Emily. It was a summer theater camp. We auditioned, got roles, practiced the musical, and did other acting skills stuff, like improv, singing, and dancing.”

“She’s very good.”

“I agree. She’s an accomplished dancer as well.”

“I see.”

“Now you know what I did. Please go ahead with why you came over to see me.”

“Right.” She didn’t speak for a couple of minutes. “I’ll get back to that. But you were fantastic. I’ve never heard you sing like that. You were so confident.”

“It helps when the person playing opposite me considers my skill level adequate for the job. I got the role. She assumed I deserved it and we worked together well. If you’re wondering, she knew I was gay from the very beginning.”

She paused momentarily, considering what Kurt had said, but then went on when what she had come to say. “Back to what I was talking about. It’s me. I came back on a high. Blaine came to McKinley. We had worked so well together over the summer. I just wanted that same feeling of success here at school. I was rude to Sugar. Instead of doing what Mr. Schue wanted and training her, I just shut her down and told her that she’d be better off lip-synching and she could still perform with us, that we always need people to dance and work on costuming and stuff.”

Kurt rolled his eyes.

“I know. I know. And then with *West Side Story*, all I could see was me and Blaine in the spotlight again – front and center stage like this past summer. I pushed Mercedes out and I was terrible to her. When Miss Pillsbury suggested that we be double cast, my response was that Mercedes could do the matinees and I could do the main evening shows. I couldn’t even be reasonable and split the performances fairly when I knew she had done better at the callback than I had.”

“Why did you say it?”

“I don’t know. I mean I do. I have to be the best. I just can’t stand letting someone else shine. And now I don’t even get to perform at Sectionals. I’m applying to NYADA and I won’t even be able to list singing at Sectionals on my CV.”
“There are consequences to actions.”

“I know. And I did something even more stupid last weekend.”

“Stop, please. We weren’t together last weekend and I’m pretty sure that whatever you did doesn’t involve me directly in any way. Unless I am directly involved some how, I’m politely asking you not to share whatever it was with me. We hadn’t even made it to being friends yet since last spring when you went psycho diva and caused the situations you’ve already brought up in this conversation. You outed the person I love, amongst other things that you already know about. And instead of changing your ways over the summer, you came back to do the same type of thing over again. Same song, different verse. It’s called ‘Me in the Limelight’ by Rachel Berry. I don’t want to know your secret from last weekend. Have you been to see the therapist that seemed to be helping you last spring?”

“I obviously quit going when I went to Chicago for the summer.”

“Go back. That’s all I can say. I can’t help you, Rachel. I just don’t know how. You don’t seem to learn from your mistakes and you keep hurting the people around you. We’re in high school and I’m not a girl, so I have no way to escape from you like Mercedes, Santana, Brittany, and Sugar did, but rest assured if you behave this way as adult, you won’t have any friends.”

She nodded. “I know.”

“I got the funding you needed. That was more than being a team player on my part. I did that for the group. Everyone’s been working really hard on the musical. Make use of the opportunity you have. Have someone film it, maybe Lauren or someone in the A/V Club. Beyond telling you to do your best, I don’t really have anything else to say to you. If you want to tell someone the stupid thing you did last weekend, you heard Carole. She said she was willing to listen to anyone in the group and do her best to help. I can’t help you. You keep digging your hole deeper and the number of people with rope ladders willing to help you out is getting smaller and smaller.”

“Can you go see if Carole will talk to me?”

“I’ll have her come down. I don’t know if she has time to talk right now, but you can work that out with her.”

Rachel nodded.

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After telling Carole that Rachel was in the family room waiting to talk to her, Kurt went upstairs. He stepped inside and closed and locked the door behind him. He saw that Sam was looking at a pair of boots online. He took a couple of steps into the room before he said anything. “Will you snuggle me?”

“Of course.” Sam put the laptop to sleep and moved to the bed.

Kurt walked around to his side and lay down as well. He put his phone on the side shelf. He sat back up and took his shirt off.

“Shirtless snuggles?”

“Mmm hmm. Is that okay?”

“Sure.” He slipped his off, lay back down, and positioned his arm to let Kurt get closer.
Once they had gotten themselves wrapped around each other and snuggled up tight, Kurt said, “I showed Rachel part of the musical from this summer. She was surprised by my performance. She wanted to talk. I feel bad in a way, but I listened a little, but then told her that we weren’t friends and that I wasn’t the person she needed to talk to about her issues. I suggested that she go back to therapy or that she talk to Carole, which is where she is now.”

“That’s actually really good. You stood up for yourself. You’re not her therapist. You haven’t become close friends. There’s no reason for her to come to you.”

“I thinks she wants us to be friends, but she doesn’t know how to be a friend and I can’t let her close to me because I don’t trust her. She only thinks of herself. I thought she was on the right track, but she’s still stuck. I don’t want to talk about her anymore. But that’s what took so long – me showing her part of the musical. If I ever get a big head and think I’m ‘all that’, please tell me. I don’t want to alienate people. I want to be the best and I want to get the leading roles, but I don’t want to be an inconsiderate attention hog to get the roles. I want to get them because I really am the best person for the role.”

“I don’t think that will be an issue for you, but I will tell you if it starts to become one.”

“Thank you.”

Sam kissed the top of Kurt’s head. “I found some good photos and I downloaded them to your flash drive. I found some awesome boots, but they’re like $300, which is obviously out of my price range.”

“We’ll keep looking or we can do what I said and find a beat up brown leather jacket, like one that can’t be repaired and I can cut it into boot-height spats and we can look for brown shoes to pair them with. It won’t be perfect, but it will be $1/100 the cost of those boots online. And maybe someday, you can get the boots.”

“That works for me.”

“Have you decided about the swim team yet?”

“I think I’m going to do it. I know it takes up time, but it’s good for me because I need something to help with my excess energy and I can’t lift weights anymore. I can do leg presses and stuff, but I don’t really want bulging thighs like the Hulk or something. I like looking slim. The meets are after school, so it shouldn’t interfere with our classes at OSU and we already discussed me not going back to work. The meets are just once a week for a couple of hours.”

“You don’t have to convince me. You should do it if you want to. I know you miss football and being on a team.”

“I do, but this won’t be like football. It’s a head-to-head competition, but it still keeps me active.”

Kurt’s phone alarm went off. “So, 10 more minutes of snuggling before we head to Westerville?”

“Snuggling and kissing?”

Kurt answered with his lips on Sam’s.

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“Come in, Kurt. It’s been quite a while since I’ve seen you. You look happy. It’s a good look on you.”
“Thank you, Mr. Adams. And I am happy. I appreciate you taking the time to see us. This is Sam Evans.”

“It’s nice to meet you, sir.”

“It’s nice to meet you as well. Have a seat, please.”

Kurt and Sam sat in the chairs facing Mr. Adams’ desk.

Kurt handed him a folder and a brown paper sack. “We’ve printed out our essays to make them easier to share with you.”

“Excellent. And thank you for lunch.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Just don’t tell anyone that this isn’t a social visit.”

“Mum’s the word,” Sam said.

The three of them opened the take-out bags Kurt and Sam had brought from Mr. Adams’ favorite deli and they all started eating. They sat in silence and ate as Mr. Adams reviewed their essays. By the time he had finished reading, they were almost finished with their lunches.

Once he finished, he said, “I think these are well done. They answer the questions you were asked and your answers are concise, but detailed, which is hard to do.”

“Thank you,” Kurt said.

“Thanks for looking at mine too,” Sam said. “I appreciate it a lot. I need to make a good impression because my grades and test scores certainly won’t.”

“You’re applying to art programs. I think they will look more carefully at your portfolio and your art class grades than your other grades. Art is something that can be taught to a small extent, but it really relies a lot on talent and skill. Both of you just need to make sure that your portfolios are submitted properly. Be sure to follow all of the directions or steps carefully.”

“We will.”

“Are you enjoying the dual-enrollment program?”

“I am. It’s a lot better than going to McKinley full time. We just have two classes there, and then four at OSU Lima.”

“I like it a lot,” Sam said. “The resource center at the college is so much better than anything available at McKinley. The new teachers have to comply with the IEPs and 504 plans, but they still didn’t really address any of the issues as far as helping any of the students with learning disabilities. I guess it will take time, but I didn’t have any more time to waste. Even though the classes are technically harder, they’re actually easier because someone will explain what I didn’t understand if I go to the resource center. Maybe McKinley is doing more during the required study hall time that Kurt and I don’t attend. But what the college offers is super helpful.”

“Good, good. I’m glad to hear that.” He slid the folder with their printed essays back towards them. “Just don’t miss the deadline in three days.”

“We won’t. We’re having them stamped at the post office Monday morning and delivered with
delivery confirmation just to make sure they make it to where they’re going.”

“I hate to rush you out, but I have another appointment in five minutes.”

“It’s fine. Thanks for spending your lunch with us on one of your busiest Saturdays of the year.”

Mr. Adams smiled. “There are always students who wait to the last minute to have people look over their applications,” he teased. “I was here last weekend too and the weekend before. It’s all part of the job description. ‘Help students get into college.’ That’s a real quote from my contracted job description, but I actually really enjoy it.”

Sam and Kurt got up. Kurt picked up the folder and put it into his satchel.

“Have a good afternoon. And thanks again.” Kurt and Sam left and went to the lobby to wait for Sebastian and Nick.

“Kurt Hummel. To what does Dalton Academy owe the pleasure of your presence?”

Kurt turned quickly and smiled. “Good afternoon, Headmaster Lawson. Sam and I are just waiting for Sebastian and Nick. We’re all going to watch the soccer team compete in the Regionals match in Columbus.”

“That is exactly where I’m headed after I do a few things in my office.” He turned towards the office door and paused. “We got that program up and running.”

“That’s great. I’m glad to hear that.”

“It was a good idea. Maybe I’ll see you at the tournament.”

Kurt nodded.

After the headmaster had gone inside the office, Sam asked, “What program?”

Kurt kept his voice low. “There are students who attend Dalton on academic scholarship from really bad situations. A few are wards of the state and rather than being placed in full-time foster care, they get scholarships and attend Dalton and stay here 10 months out of the year. And I left my books and uniforms here last spring and suggested that some kind of program be created to allow students to donate their uniforms and books so that those students can use them without having to pay for them.”

“They have to pay for them?”

“Well, someone does. Either the school includes them in their scholarship package or scholarship donors pay for them somehow and I thought that if students donated their unneeded books and uniforms they outgrew or didn’t need anymore when they graduated that it would be a good reallocation of the items.”

“Cool idea.”

“So, I guess they got it started and other students are participating.”

Nick and Sebastian came down the hall. They went out to the parking lot and when they got to the Navigator, Sam and Kurt took their jackets off. Kurt put his Dalton hoodie from the previous year on. Nick had brought one of Jeff’s down for Sam to wear.

“There. Now we’re ready to go cheer them on,” Kurt said.
After the game, the met up with Mr. Haddox, Mr. and Mrs. Sterling, and Mr. and Mrs. Duval at a Chinese buffet to celebrate their victory. Before they left to go their separate ways, the six guys stood near the back in the Navigator and talked for a few minutes.

Jeff asked quietly, “So, what happened to the director of the musical?”

Sam answered, “He was suspended for a week and lost his position as the student director.”

“Ouch,” Jeff said. “With what Kurt had said about how things went around there, I figured a verbal scolding would be all he’d get.”

“Not anymore, I guess,” Kurt said. “After Mrs. Huntington came after them last year, I think Principal Beiste is leery of letting things like that slide. Plus, she already knew that she had been in the wrong with the directors’ response to my audition. I refrained from bringing a discrimination suit against the school, but what Artie did was inappropriate and couldn’t be defended.”

Nick asked, “So, the musical is still being performed?”

“Yes,” Sam answered.

“Boo,” Jeff said.

“Why are you upset about it?” Kurt asked.

Nick answered, “Well, unfortunately we all agreed to go as a group when he came over to visit earlier this semester. So, I’m assuming he’ll be bringing the tickets over this weekend or he’s planning to have some ‘will call’ system set up.”

Mrs. Sterling called for Jeff and Nick.

“We have to get going. Thanks for coming,” Jeff said.

Jeff, Nick, and Dylan left with their parents. Sebastian got back in the Navigator and Kurt and Sam dropped him off at Dalton before heading back to Lima.

Kurt and Sam made it to Lake Erie before sunrise and sat and watched the sun come up together. Afterwards, they drove to Sam’s appointment. They didn’t wait long since he was the first appointment of the day.

“Good morning, boys,” Dr. Rouher said when he stepped in the room. “I’ve looked through your therapy reports, Sam. I’m pleased with your progress. I’m going to recommend another month of occupational therapy and based on those progress reports, I’ll decide whether to have you continue after that. Let’s have a look at your hand.” He examined Sam’s hand and asked him to do a variety of movements. When he finished, he said, “I think that everything looks good. You just need to continue with the exercises and work to build your stamina. I don’t think you need any type of brace or splinting anymore unless you feel like something you’re going to do is a danger to reinjuring yourself.”

Sam nodded.

“And as much I as would personally like the teens who did this to you to have to pay for what they
did, there’s nothing I can say medically to make them. So, I will have to sign that release so that you can go back to work. It will still have a lifting restriction until your therapist signs off on that portion.”

“That’s fine. That’s good news that I’ve recovered enough to be able to go back to work. I did get offered a position on the swim team. I have to let the coach know by this afternoon. It’s alright for me to join, right?”

“Yes. It’s fine. I’ll send a signed release to participate with you. The nurse will have it for you. Unless you get injured again, I won’t be seeing you again. Good luck with your college applications.”

“Thank you. And thanks for fixing my hand up.”

“You’re welcome.”

After their stop at the main post office branch in Toledo to send their applications in, they went back to Lima so they could get to their first class at OSU on time. Later that afternoon Kurt dropped Sam off at home on his way to work.

Sam went out shopping and picked up three pumpkins, and a pie pumpkin. He cleaned the pie pumpkin up and roasted it. He washed and dried the other three pumpkins and took them out back.

Sam and Finn handed candy out to the trick-or-treaters that came to the house. Unfortunately, Kurt missed out because he didn’t get off work until after the trick-or-treating hours were over.

After dinner, Sam took Finn and Kurt out back and showed them the pumpkins. Kurt went inside and got his pumpkin carving tools out and the three of them got to work on their pumpkins. When they finished, Kurt grabbed some candles and they lit them up on the back porch.

By the time they were finished, Carole brought out the pumpkin bread Sam had roasted the pumpkin for. She served warm spiced cider to go with it. The five of them sat outside and enjoyed the clear skies.

Thursday night was opening night for the musical. Kurt and Sam waited for the Warblers to arrive and sat with them. The production went fairly smoothly, but Santana was the show stealer. She stood out as Anita far more than Rachel did as Maria.

Jeff, Nick, Sebastian, and Dylan drove together, so they stuck around after the other Warblers had headed out.

Jeff said, “You and Emily were much better as Tony and Maria. The girl who played Anita was awesome though.”

“That’s Santana,” Kurt said. “And she is very good. She could use an ego boost. Come on. Let’s go tell her how good she was.”

Everyone followed Kurt backstage. Kurt walked into the girls’ dressing area and no one paid him any attention. He got Santana’s attention and got her to follow him back out.

“You have a fan club,” he said as he pulled the door closed.
“Figures,” she said when she looked at them with a raised eyebrow and pursed lips. “What’s the opposite of a gaggle of hags?” She paused. “It looks like I have my own gay groupies.”

Sebastian laughed. “You were fantastic. Really.”

“Thanks,” she said. “I like him.” She winked at Sebastian.

“Go get Brittany and come out with us?”

“Sure. Give me a few minutes.”

When they came back out, Jeff spoke first. “You were the best dancer up there.”

Brittany smiled and hugged him and kissed him on the cheek. “Thanks!”

There wasn’t much open late in Lima on a Thursday evening, so they headed to Steak ’n Shake.

When they were leaving, Kurt held he door open and he overheard Brittany asking Santana if they could hang out with Kurt’s dolphin and unicorn friends more often because they were nicer than regular boys. He just laughed quietly and let everyone out before stepping outside and letting the door shut.

Friday afternoon, Kurt and Sam drove to Dylan’s house to meet up with the others. They tossed their bags in the back and climbed in. An hour later, they pulled into the Sam’s Club that Kurt and Sam had been to before and they bought their food supplies for the weekend. Once they finished they drove to the farm.

Aunt Eunice was sitting on her front porch listening to her iPod and reading a book when they pulled in. She got up to greet them.

“I think this newfangled gadget you gave me for my birthday is just about one of my favorite presents ever.” She reached up and offered Kurt a hug, which he returned. She pinched his cheek. I see you’ve brought two more charming young men with you this time.”

“I did. I’m glad to hear that you’re getting a lot of use out of the iPod. This is my friend Sebastian. We were friends when we were little kids. His mother and mine were best friends. He’s here from France for the school year. And this is Dylan, his boyfriend, whose dad is a guest professor at OSU. They’re here from England for the rest of the school year.”

“Well, I don’t think I’ve ever had anyone from anywhere besides Ohio come and stay with me. I feel special now.” She hugged each one of the guys and pinched their cheeks. “You are all quite handsome. Go ahead and grab your stuff. I turned the oven on like Kurt asked, so it’s ready for you to put your pizzas in.”

The guys grabbed the groceries first. Kurt stayed in the kitchen. He put the pizzas in the oven first, and then put the rest of the groceries away. Sam showed the others where to take their stuff. It didn’t take long before the pizzas were ready. Kurt pulled them back out and sat them on top of the stove.

Aunt Eunice got Sebastian and Dylan talking by asking them if they had any pictures of where they were from. Once she got them talking, everyone joined in and relaxed. Kurt admired her hospitality skills. There wasn’t much to clean up from dinner, but Sam put the leftover pizza in the fridge, while Kurt took the trash out.
When he came back in, everyone had moved to the living room and Sam pressed play as soon as Kurt sat down between his legs and leaned back against the couch. “We never did make it to the theater to see this, but we heard it was good.” Captain America: The First Avenger began.

When it finished, Aunt Eunice commented, “You know that’s the one huge change that technology has brought. Movies look so realistic now. All those computers and people who use them to make the movie magic are just fantastic. Don’t get me wrong, I like cell phones and text messages and instant access to any piece of information I could ever need, but we did have phones and encyclopedias and dictionaries. Granted, they weren’t as fast or as complete as the internet. But videos that anyone can watch all over the world and learn how to do so many things and movies available whenever someone wants to watch them is just mind-blowing. It’s just fun for an old lady like me to take a video of my horses and be able to watch it like I’m some Hollywood film maker. Regular people being able to make their own movies was just stuff of science fiction. Now, there’s something fun for you youngsters to do. Watch the original Star Trek series and think about all of the things they pretended were real that now are available to everyone. Less than 50 years. It seems like a long time, but in the grand scheme of things, it’s really not. I’ll quit boring you with my silly nostalgia.”

Kurt said, “You’re never boring, Aunt Eunice. You’re a lot more interesting than our history teachers. They just make us memorize facts about who led what country in which war and what they were fighting over. We never really learn much about what it was like to live in another era.”

She said, “That’s why kids think history is boring. Schools took all the humanity out of the topic. Facts and figures don’t mean much to anyone but statisticians. Stories about people – that gets kids’ attention. I’m going to head to bed. I’m too old to stay up much later. I’ll just start dozing while we talk.” She went to her room and went to sleep.

After breakfast Saturday morning, they went to Alan Cottrill’s studio again. Sam was sure that Dylan would really like it and that the other three wouldn’t mind going. He was right. Mr. Cottrill was there again and spent quite a bit of time talking to Dylan and Sam. After they left the studio, they went to the deli in town. They ordered everything to go and went the park and ate. Kurt had the Frisbee in the back still from when he and Sam had gone to the playland on their first date. He pulled it out and the six of them played for a while.

Kurt drove back over the Y bridge even though it was out of the way, just so that everyone could see it. They stopped and returned the movie to a Redbox before they returned to Aunt Eunice’s.

Once they were back, they went out and spent the afternoon riding horses. Both Sebastian and Dylan already knew how to ride, so once they got the horses ready, everyone rode off together. When they got back, they fed the horses apples and carrots, groomed them, and put them back in their stables.

Kurt and Sam showered first when they got back to the house so that they could get started making dinner. Everyone showered quickly so no one would be left with cold water. By the time the other four came down, Kurt and Sam were ready to serve the chili. Aunt Eunice joined them for dinner. Kurt put the leftovers in her freezer for her to have later.

Instead of a movie, Kurt managed to get Aunt Eunice to tell them stories from when she was young. The six teens sat and listened as she talked for a couple of hours, telling a lot of stories of what it was like to be a teen in the 50’s and how life was for women and minorities. Once she had reached her bedtime, she went off to her room and left them to their own devices to entertain themselves. Nick and Jeff stayed downstairs to watch a movie they had brought with them. The
other four went up to bed.

The next morning after breakfast, Nick and Jeff taught Sebastian and Dylan how to operate the 4-wheelers. They took turns and rode alongside them for a little bit. Once they got the hang of it, they switched and let Dylan and Sebastian ride together. Jeff and Nick traded off with Dylan and Sebastian.

Sam wasn’t comfortable with the idea of all of the vibration from the 4-wheelers, and what it might do to his hand. He decided to err on the side of caution and he sat out.

He and Kurt went for a walk together to the horse barn where they talked to the horses and went out the other end of the barn where no one could see them. Kurt leaned against Sam and wrapped his arms around him. They enjoyed the weather and the view and the kissing.

They put the 4-wheelers back away before lunch and went back up to the house. Everyone washed up and they put the deli meats, cheeses, and the asiago cheese bagels Kurt had found out for lunch, along with the vegetable tray and sliced apples.

After lunch, Kurt pulled out Aunt Eunice’s board games and they divided into groups and played Aggravation and Trouble, and then they played Monopoly with all seven of them playing. Once Aunt Eunice had annihilated everyone in Monopoly, they switched to playing Uno and Rook. About an hour before dark, they put the games away and made themselves a second sandwich to take for the drive back and loaded their things in the Navigator. They thanked her for letting them visit. After Aunt Eunice hugged each of them, they got in the Navigator. They waved as they headed out.

Kurt and Sam switched positions when they dropped the other four off at Dylan’s house. They switched again when they got to Bellefontaine because Sam was getting a little tired. They got out and stretched a bit and continued on their way back to Lima.

Kurt grabbed their bag and they went inside. He reset the security alarm after they were in. Burt and Carole were sitting in the living room when he came in. Burt was reading USA Today and had the New York Times on the couch next to him. Carole was reading mystery of some sort.

“Good evening, boys,” Carole said.

“Good evening,” Sam said.

“Aunt Eunice is vicious at Monopoly,” Kurt said, shaking his head a bit and laughing.

“Ah, you found out the hard way, I presume.”

“We all did,” Sam said. “She beat all six of us. I think she had 80% of the money by the end.”

“I’m not sure that anyone has ever beaten her.”

Kurt said, “I guess that makes me feel better.”

Carole laughed. “We wanted to tell you something before you see Finn.”

Sam said, “Alright.”
“Friday night was the last football game of the season. The scout from OSU that Finn had hoped was going to offer him a place, offered Shane a scholarship instead.”

Kurt said, “Oh. I guess I didn’t realize that Finn thought he might get recruited. We haven’t won that many games and there must be hundreds of quarterbacks and only a couple of positions available, first string and second string or whatever.”

Carole responded, “I honestly didn’t know either. He didn’t talk about it until after the game Friday night. He was really upset. He still is. We just wanted you to know. If you had been home, you would have heard him. It’s not a secret. We’re just surprised at how hard he’s taking it considering he didn’t really talk about it. He’s been enjoying his job at the Y coaching the kids. I thought maybe he was more interested in coaching than trying to play football and go to college.”

Burt said, “We’re going to talk to him more and get him a few more appointments with that guy we took him to see in Columbus last spring. You know, to see if he can help Finn find some training programs or a college that offers something he’s interested in. Applications are due in a month or two. He needs to figure out what he wants to do.”

Carole asked, “When will you two hear back from the early applications you turned in?”

“They get mailed out December 15th,” Kurt answered. “So, sometime after that.”

“And when do you have to answer?” Burt asked.

“Not until the regular time – May 1st. We didn’t apply to schools with the early decision where you have to decide in December – just early application times with finding out early whether we get in or not. Then, if we get into our first picks, we don’t have to keep applying other places. Those application fees add up. But if we don’t get in, we’ll apply to our other choices. We might apply to one or two of them anyway. A really good financial package might sway me to like a school more than I did initially.”

Burt asked, “What do you mean?”

Kurt said, “I mean, if the tuition is out of my reach, it slipped down my list of top school choices. What’s the point in choosing a place and putting at the top of my list if I can’t afford to go there? But if that same school offered me a full tuition scholarship, it would move back up my list.”

Sam said, “The difference in prices is pretty significant. Some of the places we like charge $50,000 a year for tuition, plus they’re in areas with no dorms and an average rental price of $2000 a month for a studio or very tiny one-bedroom place. Other schools charge $8-$10,000 a year, plus they offer room and board in a dorm for $10,000 a year. So, close to $80,000 a year each for the places in New York City or $20,000 a year for a small school or state school in Ohio.”

Kurt added, “But if I got a full tuition scholarship to one of those expensive places, the living expenses would be less than the tuition and room and board at the Ohio school without a scholarship.”

Burt said, “I get it, but why on earth do colleges charge $50,000 a tuition?”

Kurt answered, “I wish I knew. I wish I knew whether a $50,000 a year college is actually worth it. I haven’t figure out how it could be unless you’re really rich and the $50,000 isn’t a problem for you to pay. It’s like comparing a $100,000 car to a $20,000 car. One has a lot of amazing features, but they both drive. The more expensive one won’t get me to where I’m going more quickly. There are places that rank colleges and that’s somewhat helpful, but you have to pay close attention to
what’s being used as the criteria for the rankings. Are they ranked based on how many people with a degree get a job within 6 months? Or are they ranked on how much the people in the program enjoy it? There’s just so much to consider. Sam and I would both have to work full time at minimum wage to be able to afford a tiny apartment near any of the colleges in New York City. On top of that $24,000 a year for rent in New York, we’d have electricity, water, internet, groceries. With the room and board in a dorm, we wouldn’t have those extra expenses, just the summer expenses, but I’m assuming that we’re allowed to come home in the summers.”

“Yeah, of course,” Burt said. “Sounds like a lot more went into working out where to apply to than I considered, even with you telling me about it.”

“It’s really stressful to know that if you pick a program and you don’t like it after you get there, that you might not be able to transfer your classes to another college, even if you keep the same major or concentration.”

Sam said, “All the talk we hear from the teachers about ‘finding ourselves’ in college and exploring all of the amazing options out there – college must have been a lot cheaper when they attended because I don’t know anyone that has $75,000 to blow on ‘finding themselves’ for a year while ‘exploring their options’. Even going to a state school and spending over $20,000 to ‘find myself’ is way out of my budget. I could probably buy a decent house in Zanesville for less than $80,000. I could pay it off in like five years, and then be able to work part time somewhere and be an artist without the starving part.”

“The same thing is true for me. I’d love to be on Broadway in theory, but in reality I would rather be performing on a stage in Toledo or Cleveland or Cincinnati or Columbus than I would to be asking people ‘Do you want fries with that?’ or ‘Is there something I can help you find?’ while working retail in New York City. I did all sort of calculations. A $2000 monthly payment is the mortgage payment on a $500,000 house. But on a minimum wage job, the most a bank would loan me is less than $50,000. So, why do people expect $2000 in rent on an apartment the size of this living room?”

“I don’t know, kiddo.”

“Well, if you get elected, I’d like college tuition investigated as the 21st century’s greatest scam,” Kurt said. “News articles blame Millennials for the flailing real estate market. I’d like to see them pay back $1000 a month in school loans for 10 years from a state college education and still be able to afford the mortgage payment on a house.”

“That’s a good point. People like to point fingers at anyone but themselves.”

“When I did all that research for that seminar last spring, I learned that getting a part in an off-Broadway show would not pay enough for me to live in New York City and repay $200,000 in school loans – meaning if I went to one of the expensive schools in the City. And those jobs are temporary. Off-Broadway shows don’t stick around for years on end. And it’s not just my field. People go to expensive schools to study other things as well. And most of the time entry-level jobs that require college degrees just don’t pay enough to pay back the loans and live from what I calculated. Paying back the tuition cost alone for a 4-year program that costs $50,000 is $1900 a month. Teachers with a Bachelor’s degree only make $35,000-40,000 a year. I’ll spare you the rest of the math calculation. Basically, they have $800 a month left after they make their student loan payment. That’s barely enough to live on if you share 1-bedroom place with someone in a small town like this. You’d have to get like four people to share a 2-bedroom place in a bigger city. They couldn’t afford a car payment at all. And they’d have to do that for 10 years until they paid their loans off. So, they’d be 32 before they could either move out of their parents’ place or some other
type of shared living and live on their own and buy a car, and later maybe have kids.”

“We can’t burden the next generation with so much debt that they can’t afford to buy a house or a car or have a family.”

“That’s what’s happening though. On that dreary note, I’m ready to go to bed. We had a good time, but was a long drive back in the dark.” Kurt picked their bag up from where he had put it when he plopped in the chair after Carole had started to talk to him. “Good night.”

Sam followed him up the stairs. He pushed the door closed and locked it. He walked up behind Kurt, and wrapped his arms around him and reached for the hem of his shirt. He spoke in his best English butler impression, “May I help you with the removal of this clothing item?”

Kurt played along, “Why, yes of course, Evans.”

Sam took Kurt’s shirt off and threw it on top of their yet-to-be-emptied duffle. “And with your shoes, sir?”

“Yes, please.” Kurt sat on the end of the bed.

Sam knelt to unlace Kurt’s shoes, and then moved them out of the way. He reached up and put his hands on Kurt’s waist and tipped his head up. Kurt broke character and leaned down and kissed him. “The pants too, if you please,” he resumed.

Sam removed Kurt’s jeans and put them on the duffle as well.

“Now, your own clothes as well, Evans.”

Sam stood and did a music-less strip tease for Kurt. By the time he was standing up from pulling his socks off, Kurt was up off the bed and wrapping his arms around Sam and began to kiss him.

“I think I’ll need your assistance in the shower, Evans.” Kurt took him by the hand and pulled him toward the bathroom.

“Yes, sir. Of course, sir,” he said, barely containing his laughter.

Kurt curled up on Sam’s chest. “Eight months and you aren’t tired of me yet?”

Sam ran his hand along Kurt’s arm, and then slipped it down between his arm and his ribs and started to tickle him just slightly. “Definitely not. The opposite. The longer we’re together, the more I like it.”

Kurt ran his hand along Sam’s chest. “Me too. I looked at the calendar when I came out of the bathroom. It’s hard to believe that Thanksgiving is in two and a half weeks. Are you planning to go to Kentucky?”

“No. I hadn’t even considered it.”

“I wonder if they would come here.”

“I have no idea. You’d have to talk to your Dad and Carole first.”

“I know, but it could be fun.”
“It could be. It’s hard for me because I felt torn between understanding why they feel the way they do and expecting better of them. But then I think I should have expected their hands-off behavior now because when I said I was staying and not going with them, they really took my choice as an adult choice and I told you my dad gave me the ‘Now you’re a man’ speech. Maybe I just didn’t quite understand what that meant at the time. I took it as he wasn’t going to fight me on my choice since I was nearly 18. But I’ve been doing a lot of thinking and when I think how they behave with their own parents, my parents are the ones that make the effort. My mom calls up her mom to tell her about things. My dad calls his dad. I just never thought about it, but I really can’t remember my grandparents calling our house to talk to my parents unless there was an actual reason, like a family get-together or to let them know that something happened to someone. You know, like someone was getting married or was going to have a baby or someone got injured.”

“So, you think the ‘No news is good news.’ is just their way of treating you like an adult?”

“I think it is. They let me make an adult choice and they’re treating me like the adult I said I was. And combine that with the fact that they know that your parents are watching out for me – I think I need to have a talk with them and get it resolved though.”

“If your current line of think is right then they probably don’t even know that you’re upset with them about not calling you. When you were calling them, did they seem pleased to hear from you or did you feel like they were trying to end the call as quickly as possible?”

“They seemed happy about it. I think this is all on me. They passed the baton and I dropped it and blamed them for a lousy handoff when I was the one who didn’t grab tight and run. They let me move on to adulthood and call the shots for myself. I just need to rethink about how I’ve responded. Thinking about it from that angle, they probably wonder why I don’t call.”

“You can call them tomorrow or whenever. Figure out how often you think it’s reasonable to call them and just start doing it. I know you’re mad about their choices, but in all honesty, they’re adults and you’re an adult. You can’t badger them about their choice unless you want to be badgered about yours when you don’t make the choice they want you to.”

“That’s a good point. I don’t like that it’s a good point because I want them to not go to that church. But I did go against their wishes and I probably shouldn’t have. Ugh. Some things are just too complicated. They know what’s right. They aren’t doing it. I have to let it fall on them. But Stevie and Stacey are involved, which is why it’s so complicated. And I made it worse.”

“Just explain that to them. Explain that you were caught between answering Stevie and Stacey truthfully and making things harder now or lying to them and making things harder later. Neither choice was neutral. You made a choice in a situation that didn’t have a right answer and a wrong answer. And that’s that. You have to figure out where to go from here.”

“I’ll call them tomorrow after I get back from classes.”

“Being an adult is hard. We’ll get the hang of it, eventually.” Kurt turned his head and kissed Sam on the neck. “We’re new at it.”

“You’re right. I can’t be so hard on myself, but I need to keep working at it.”

“Maybe learning from our mistakes is the key to it.”

“Yeah. Do you want to sleep like this?”

“Mmm hmm.”
Sam rearranged just enough to get a little more comfortable. “Thanks for always listening.” He kissed Kurt on the top of his head.

“You listen to me too,” Kurt said sounding too sleepy to continue talking. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

The press was waiting outside the house Tuesday morning. Burt stopped and spoke briefly, allowing the three teens time to escape their questions and make it into their vehicles to leave. Carole had already gone to work before the press showed up. The four of them went to their local voting location and made their choice. The three teens left as soon as they had voted. Burt went to the shop, where press members were waiting for him as well. He made a brief statement, and then politely asked them to move to another location because they were keeping customers from being able to get into the parking lot.

No one followed the teens as they left. Finn went to McDonald’s to eat since he didn’t have anything else to do before school started. Sam and Kurt went to the school. Sam went to swim team practice and Kurt did his government questions as usual. Once practice ended, Sam came out and kissed Kurt and sat down next to him as had become his routine.

They walked to US Government class together. Once the bell rang, Mr. Sanchez spent about 10 minutes explaining how a special election worked. Afterwards, he moved back to his regular lesson plan. He was a thorough teacher who didn’t show favorites, which was the type of teacher that Kurt had only previously encountered at Dalton. He treated the students as adults and did not take excuses for reasons, but was willing to listen when a student had a valid reason for requesting extra time or some other type of leniency.

Kurt checked the exit poll data after class. He and Sam went to their classes at OSU and Kurt checked again after each class. Sam went to the tutoring center after their classes. After he got the help he needed, he went to the shop to continue with his visual learning since he still didn’t have the hand strength that he needed to actually perform the tasks yet.

The polls closed a half-hour before the shop did. Kurt went home, showered, and changed before he and Sam went to the small office that Burt had rented to run his campaign from. By they time he and Sam got there, Burt had a significant lead that made it pretty certain that he had won. They ordered pizza and ate it while they continued to watch as the polling results came in from the rest of the precincts.

Since there weren’t any other elections, it didn’t take long to get the mailed in ballots counted for each precinct. By 10:00, all of the precincts had reported their final tallies. Burt had won with 59% of the vote, which was quite impressive in a 3-way vote. Once the tallies were in, the press waiting outside pushed for a statement. After Burt made a brief speech, they went home.

Sebastian called Thursday evening after the soccer match ended. Dalton had won and was headed to the State Finals on Sunday. Kurt called Jeff and Dylan an hour later and he and Sam congratulated them both. After they hung up, they discussed the option of going and watching the soccer game. They hadn’t made their minds up when they went back to doing their homework.

Once they finished Kurt stacked his books up on his shelf and went and stood in front of the calendars on the wall in the alcove. Sam followed him after he put his own books away.
“What are you staring at so intently?” Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt and propped his chin on Kurt’s shoulder.

“I’m just debating whether I can spare five or six hours on Sunday. It seems like it should be no big deal. But looking at this we only have Glee seven times before Sectionals and we haven’t even started rehearsing, even with the extra time of not competing until after Thanksgiving this year, Mr. Schue hasn’t used it. And we only have three weeks before our OSU finals. I chose the project and then didn’t do anything to get started on it. We already told everyone we were going to the Warblers’ Sectionals next weekend. I think I need to go to Goodwill tonight before it closes and see what I can find for pants and a shirt. I should have been going every evening when I got off from work until I found what I needed.”

“We never gave them any indication that we’d go on Sunday.”

“I know, but I really wanted to. Jeff’s our friend and this a big deal to him.”

“Let’s go out and see what we can find.” Sam let go of Kurt and went around the bed and grabbed shoes out of the closet and started to put them on. “If we don’t find what you need, I’ll go out tomorrow afternoon as soon as we get out of class and I’ll start at the closest places and work my way outward to see if I can find a brown shirt. That’s going to be the hardest part. If I can’t find one tomorrow or Saturday early, I don’t see how we can avoid ordering one, even though you’ll have to pay a lot more for it. The coat and the shirt go together and without the shirt, you’ll have a hard time getting the coat to look right.”

Kurt put his shoes on too, and grabbed a jacket for both of them. “Now that I think about it, I think we might go to the game anyway because I doubt I’ll find the fabric I need for the coat here in Lima. We’ll have to go looking in Columbus at the fabric stores there. Ugh. We did all of this to stay organized and I let myself get distracted anyway.” He handed Sam’s jacket to him.

“It’s not hopeless yet. Don’t give up.” He slipped the jacket on and took Kurt’s hand. “Let’s go see what we can find.”

“Okay, you look through all of the pants and pull out all of the khaki ones that have any hope of fitting. I’m going to look through the button-ups.”

Less than 10 minutes later, Sam pushed the cart over with 6 pairs of pants hanging over the side.

“I’m not finding anything brown. Can you start looking through the smalls and mediums just to see if someone put one in the wrong place? It needs to be an oversized large or an x-large for me to make it look like Mal’s shirt.”

“Got it.” Sam started looking, but didn’t end up having any luck.

Kurt moved on to the xx-large shirts. He pulled one out. “There’s one brown shirt. Let’s at least give it a shot. Kurt looked through the pants that Sam had found and eliminated two of them based on the fabric. “Can you try these four on so I can see which ones would be the best? And put the shirt on too, please?”

“Sure.”

Kurt walked away from the dressing rooms and started to look through the jackets to see if he could find a beat up leather trench coat or jacket that he could use to make the boots and the cuffs for the trench coat. He found one possibility and put it in the cart and went to look through the
shoes, which is where he was when Sam opened the dressing room door and stepped out.

“So?”

“The shirt has potential. Those pants are too low rise. You need ones that come up higher than we wear our pants. All of the photos show his pants to be basically at the belly button.”

Sam looked in the mirror on the wall between two of the dressing room doors and nodded. “You’re right. I’ll go put the others on and see if any of them are higher at the waist.”

Kurt continued his search through the shoes. He pulled up the photo he had of the boots again to get a better look. He realized he had been mistaken about the type of shoes he needed. He went back to the beginning of the aisle and started to look again. He picked up a pair of old fashioned squared-toed dress shoes that laced. He compared them with the color of the leather jacket and it was close. Maybe polishing the leather on the shoes would get them the just slightly darker shade of brown they needed to be. He put them in the cart.

Sam came back out of the dressing room. “These have the highest waist. What do you think?”

Kurt pulled up the photo of the pants. “Those aren’t bad. They’re too big around the waist, but the fit through the thighs and calves is right and you’re supposed to wear suspenders. They’re $4. Let’s give them a try. Before you put your clothes back on, try these shoes.” Kurt handed him the shoes.

Sam put them on and walked around a little bit. “They’re fine. They’re a tiny bit loose, but they’re the right length.”

“I can fix loose. I can’t fix too short.”

Sam laughed. “Then, they’ll be fine.” He handed them back to Kurt and went back to put his clothes on.

Kurt moved away from the dressing rooms and started to look through the suspenders and the belts. He looked at the photos he had again and found a pair of suspenders that had the right type of fasteners and put them in the cart. Next, he looked for a pair that was the right color and he put them in the cart. They had the modern clip fasteners on the straps, so he would need switch them for the old fashioned leather ones on the other pair. He looked through the belts and had several in the cart when Sam came out. “Any of these? For the belts he wears to hold the gun holster up.”

“This one with the double buckle. Let’s see if it’s long enough to fit like it should.” He fastened it. “Seems fine.”

“We don’t have to get the belt today if it’s not what you want.”

“No, really. It’s good. Zoom in on the picture.”

Kurt did. “You’re right. It’s pretty close. The shirt’s a little darker than I had wanted, but we’ll start with it since it’s the only one. If we find a better one in Columbus we’ll get it. I found an old women’s leather trench coat that is a disaster. The lining is in shambles. The belt is missing. Par of the collar is torn loose. But the majority of the leather is in decent shape. It’s $10. I’ll never be able to buy this much leather for $10. This coat will be the boots, eventually. I’m not even going to start on them until after the entire outfit is finished.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“$25 plus taxes leaves me with enough leeway to get everything else.”
“I didn’t hear that there was a budget limit when you read the requirements.”

“$100, but $50 is preferred. The professor will factor in the relative cost of the materials. The idea is to pretend that we are doing this for a small show with a low budget.”

“Got it. Do you want to look at anything else? They close in 10 minutes.”

“I’m just going to look through the medium button-ups really quick. Oh, actually there was this one shirt I thought you might just like.” Kurt pulled it out off the rack and showed Sam.

“That’s nice.” He took it from Kurt and went in the dressing room to try it on. He came out and showed it to Kurt, who was still looking through the rack.

“Very nice. What do you think?”

“I’m going to get it. It’s a really nice color. I like the deep forest green and the tiny cream pattern is nice. It’s a good color for holiday photos and for the whole winter. Did you find anything?”

“Nope. I’m good.”

Since there was no one else in line, they checked out quickly and headed back home.

Once they were in the Nav, Kurt said, “I need to photograph you in the clothes before I alter them. I’ll wash them tonight and then maybe I can get the photos done when we get home tomorrow afternoon. Daylight photos always look better. That way I can get started on the alterations. It’s going to take a lot of work to make that coat. I’m going to buy a pattern and alter it. I can’t just make it from scratch. If I had a coat that was already done, I could make a pattern off of it, but I don’t have time to make the whole thing from scratch since I didn’t get started on it a couple of weeks ago like I should have.”

“I’ll model whatever you want, whenever you need me too. I’m just super excited about the whole thing. If there’s enough leather left over, maybe we can make the gun holster. I can’t even take a toy gun in the cons, but I can still wear the holster around. And I can add a toy gun for a contest. Those kinds of props have to be inspected and used just for the contests.”

“I’ll do everything in my power to make you the perfect replica of Mal, but more handsome of course.”

Sam laughed. “Of course.”

Saturday morning, they went to JoAnn Fabrics and Kurt bought new buttons since the original ones were cream colored and slightly iridescent. He also bought the silver buttons for the pants to fasten the suspenders to.

They stopped at the library on the way home and Sam picked up some new graphic novels and mangas to read. They had been waiting for the next Redwall audio book to come in on interlibrary loan from Dayton and it was there waiting for them.

Kurt spent the rest of the day working on the shirt and prepping the pants for the brown stripe he needed to add to the outer seam. He made the collar on the shirt look more like Malcom’s. He tapered the legs on the pants so that they would fit in the boots and he removed the belt loops. They alternated between listening to instrumental music while Sam read and Kurt did more complicated sewing work and listening to the new audio book.
Sam went down to the family room for a while and spent time talking to his family on the phone. His parents had been waiting for him to be the one to call. When he called to work things out, there were apologies from Sam and his parents and they had resolved everything. Stevie and Stacey were thrilled to talk to him when he had called to straighten things out. They had quit going to that particular church and found one in a town about 20 minutes away that was much more accepting and had their weekly kids’ activities on Sunday evenings during the regular church service, so Stevie and Stacey were still getting to do fun things with kids their age.

By dinnertime, Kurt was ready to call it a day. After they ate dinner, they showered and got in bed and continued to listen to the book, replacing their Sunday snuggles with some abbreviated Saturday evening snuggles since they would be gone to Columbus all the next day.

Kurt found the brown fabric he needed for the coat, but not until they had been to two places before the game and two more places afterwards. They took time out before the second part of their quest to go out with everyone to celebrate Dalton’s State Soccer Championship.

Nearly a week later after spending yet another week not rehearsing for Sectionals, Kurt and Sam went to watch the Warblers compete at their Sectionals. When the Warblers left the stage, Kurt leaned over and whispered, “We’re so going to lose Regionals, if we even make it that far.”

Sam nodded in agreement.

They waited for Nick, Jeff, Sebastian, and Dylan to come out to the lobby afterwards. Jeff hugged both of them as soon as he got close enough.

Kurt said, “You all were amazing! All I can say is that if we manage to pull out a win at Sectionals, we’re going to have to really step up our game to beat you all at Regionals.”

“That was really fantastic – getting everyone in sync like that.” Sam shook his head. “I don’t see how we can beat that, unless we manage to get the girls back.”

“Back?” Jeff asked.

“You might as well know now,” Kurt said. “You’ll see if you come watch us in two weeks. We lost Mercedes, Brittany, and Santana. There’s a new girl named Sugar and 8 Cheerios that started a new Glee Club called the Troubletones. We have Quinn and Tina left and 8 guys. We’re going to have to have two of the band members sing with us in order to even have enough people to compete at Sectionals.”

Sam added, “So, they have 10 girls who are also on a nationally ranked cheer squad and they have our two best female singers.”

“Ouch,” Jeff said. “What about … Rachel?”

“She can’t compete from the ballot stuffing fiasco.”

Jeff said, “I had forgotten about that. Not what she did, but her punishment for doing it.”

“Yeah. The group split when Sugar wasn’t made to feel welcome in the group and Mercedes followed her and then Santana and Brittany.”
Nick said, “Wait… THAT Santana and Brittany.”

“Exactly,” Sam said.

“Damn,” Jeff said. “You are in trouble. So, the best dancer in your school is working with them and Santana is singing lead. We’ll have to bring our A game to win at Regionals.”


“Sorry, pal,” Jeff said, patting Kurt on the shoulder with fake sympathy. “Those two rock and you know it. And as an all-guys group, the Warblers are better than the New Directions. Especially with our new and improved choreography.”

“I know, but I can’t do anything to change anything. They asked me to join them. While I would absolutely love to sing with them, I’m trying to have a drama free year and participating in their all-girl group didn’t seem to be the way to go about doing that. So, I said no and then had all the drama anyway.” He didn’t talk about how the New Directions hadn’t even started rehearsing yet.

“Panera, Chipotle, Cheesecake Factory, Mexican?” Jeff started suggesting places to eat.

“Since you’re obviously the hungriest, you pick,” Kurt said.

“There’s this Mexican place in Westerville that’s excellent.”

“¡Vámonos!” Kurt said.
The Monday of Thanksgiving week, Mr. Schue finally got serious about Sectionals. He asked two of the band members to rehearse with them to make the 12 members they needed to be able to compete.

He chose three Michael Jackson songs to do. ‘ABC’ with a split lead between Tina, Quinn, and Kurt. Kurt protested Mr. Schue’s choice of giving Artie and Blaine featured parts in ‘Man in the Mirror’. He insisted that Rory and Mike be given those parts since Blaine and Artie were splitting the lead on ‘Control’. So, ‘Man in the Mirror’ would feature Finn, Puck, Sam, Rory, and Mike. Everyone besides the two members from the band ended up with featured parts with Kurt’s input and insistence.

Mr. Schue scheduled an all-day rehearsal for the Sunday after Thanksgiving, which was no surprise to anyone after he had wasted the entire semester up to that point by not working on anything for the competition.

Kurt woke up before Sam and lay completely still and watched Sam sleep. It didn’t take long for Sam to stretch a bit.

“Why’re you way ov’r there?”

“I woke up over here.”


Kurt giggled when Sam tickled him as he tried to get a grip on him to pull him closer. Once Sam managed to get Kurt curled back up on him like he wanted, Kurt kissed him on the neck.

“S’better. Kisses ‘n snuggles.”

“You’re adorable.”

“You’re snuggly.”

“We’re supposed to get up and start cooking.”

“Not ‘til the sun’s up.”

Kurt gave up and lay there for 15 minutes kissing Sam’s neck every now and tracing patterns on his chest. Once the sun started to peek through the curtains, Kurt’s neck kisses grew more frequent and he began to move them from near the collarbone area up towards Sam’s ear. When he eventually made it up to his ear, he whispered, “I love you” and lightly nipped and licked Sam’s ear.

“You are persistent this morning.”

“And you’re wide awake and speaking clearly now,” Kurt teased.

“Well, as amazing as it feels, it is hard to sleep through you kissing my neck and running your
fingers all over my chest. I’m awake now in more ways than one thanks to your persistent efforts at waking me up.”

“Oh, good. Just what I’ve been waiting for.” Kurt moved his hand down Sam’s chest. “May I?”

“Definitely.”

By 10:00, Kurt had a pumpkin pie ready to go in the oven, three dozen snickerdoodles baked, and the crust ready for the chocolate cream pie filling that Sam had made. Sam poured the filling in and put it in the refrigerator to cool.

Sam had also cut two dozen pumpkins out of sugar cookie dough for Stevie and Stacey to decorate later. The sugar cookies went into the oven. Sam began to skewer the vegetables that Kurt cut into chunks to put on the grill later. They put those in a glass dish and moved it out of the way.

They put the next tray of pumpkin cookies in and started on the vegetable soup for the crockpot. When they pulled the last cookie tray out, the pumpkin pie went in. Next, Sam made the batter for pumpkin bread while Kurt peeled potatoes. After that, he scrubbed sweet potatoes and Sam dried them and wrapped them in foil to go on the grill later.

Carole came in and surveyed the area. “You two are very efficient.”

“Thank you,” Kurt said. “Next is the coleslaw.”

“I’ll make breakfast, well brunch, while you two work on that. Finn will be up soon. Burt’s up. He’s just watching the news in our room. He’ll be out soon.”

Sam and Kurt continued what they were doing. Carole was right and Finn was down a few minutes later.

“It smell great in here,” Finn said. “Mmm. What’s in the oven?”

“A pumpkin pie,” Sam answered.

“Yum. I love Thanksgiving almost as much as I love Christmas.”

“I’m making a pecan pie next,” Kurt said. “And I believe you requested brownies.”

“I did. You’re awesome you know.”

“You think that now because you found out that I can bake.”

Finn said, “You should have baked for the jocks back in freshman year. You could have subdued them all with your magic powers of baking.”

Kurt laughed. “That idea never crossed my mind, but you could be right.”

Kurt finished up the slaw while Sam started on the pecan pie filling. Carole finished brunch. Kurt and Sam snatched some turkey bacon and a couple of sausages and continued to work. They had eaten scrambled eggs quickly before they had started cooking, but the snack was a welcome one.

By noon, everything on their list was done. Sam helped Kurt iron the tablecloth. They put it on the table and put the table runner back on.
Kurt asked Carole, “Now that you’ve looked around, did you think of anything else you need?”

“Actually, I think I need another large bag of baby carrots. I got one for the vegetable tray, but I forgot that I needed one for the roast for Friday.”

“Alright. We’re going to go get ready. We’ll grab the carrots and the rest of the stuff on the list. If you think of anything else, just text me.”

“Will do. Thank you, honey.”

“You’re welcome.”

“I think you’re going the wrong direction.”

“Nope. This is the right direction.”

“I know for certain that Sam’s Club was the other direction at the turn back there.”

“I know.” Kurt smiled and went back to singing along with the CD that was playing.

It didn’t take much longer for Sam to figure out where they were going. Kurt pulled off the road and into the parking area. He hopped out and Sam followed him. He reached for Kurt’s hand and they followed the trail around the reservoir towards the tree-lined section.

“I thought we could use a little quiet time before everyone arrives later.”

They walked along the trail for about 10 minutes, and then turned around and headed back to where they had parked. From there, Kurt drove back the way he came, crossed the road and headed down through the restaurants to Sam’s Club.

They picked up everything on Carole’s list. Before they left, they stopped at the snack bar and bought a hot dog combo and a chocolate frozen yogurt to split. Kurt grabbed the cup and filled it with ice and then with the unsweetened raspberry tea from the tea machine. Sam fixed their hot dog up with sauerkraut and mustard and grabbed napkins, a knife and two spoons. They sat down at one of the indoor picnic tables to eat. Sam cut the giant hot dog in half and put half of it on a napkin and slid it towards Kurt.

Sam asked, “Anything else we need to do before we go back?”

“Well, Michael’s is starting their black Friday sales this afternoon. If there’s anything you need, today would be a good day to get it. 20% of the sale price.”

“Ooh. You’re tempting me.” He pulled his phone out and looked up the ad. “I’ve been wanting one of those fan brushes.”

“I know.”

“They’re on sale.”

“So, we’re going to Michael’s?”

“Talk me out of it.”

Kurt laughed. “I’d rather go buy it for you than talk you out of it.”
“You’re not much help in the resisting temptation area, are you?”

Kurt moved his foot and bumped it into Sam’s under the table. “I think I’m more of the ‘lead you into temptation and enjoy it with you’ type.”

“So, the angelic look?”

“All part of the disguise.” He winked at Sam and handed him a spoon.

Sam laughed. Sam took the spoon and started to eat the frozen yogurt with Kurt. Once they finished, Sam dumped their trash while Kurt refilled their ice tea. Kurt pushed the cart and got in the line to have their receipt checked.

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When they got back, Finn came out and helped them unload the Navigator. Carole directed where to put everything like a seasoned, big-city traffic cop. Once everything was put away, she sent Finn up to change.

“Put something on that matches. Preferably something with buttons, and long pants.”

“Yes, Mom.”

Kurt laughed. “I’m not sure why you didn’t think a grungy undershirt tank top and a pair of basketball shorts with holes in them and a zip-up hoodie is the appropriate attire for dinner.”

Carole rolled her eyes. “Please, for his own good, give him some fashion lessons soon. I’m certain that he has a secret girlfriend that he’s not told us about yet, but once he’s not just taking her out to lunch after basketball on Saturday mornings, he’s going to need to prove that he can dress like an adult.”

“A secret girlfriend, you say? I can work with that,” Kurt winked and went upstairs.

He knocked on Finn’s door.

“Yeah?”

Kurt opened it and stepped inside. “Would you like some fashion advice?”

“Um, sure. Mom said a shirt with buttons. I have three because I’m sure she didn’t mean the polos or rugby shirts, even though they do technically have buttons.”

“Good. You’re thinking about the meaning, not just the words. That’s an example of paying closer attention. I think you need some new clothes.”

“Why, dude? I hardly ever dress up.”

“Yeah, well, it’s not just dressing up. It’s just dressing a little more fashionably. If I get Carole to give me money, will you let me take you shopping? I think you’re wearing the wrong size clothes, which is okay for school or whatever, but for going out places, like the movies or to dinner or even a museum, they’re not quite right.”

“Why would I be going to the movies or a museum?”

“I thought the idea was to find some new friends that don’t go to McKinley. Like maybe a girl?”
“Fine. There is this girl I met that I really like. We’re not exactly dating, but we’re not NOT dating.”

Kurt laughed.

“Be nice.”

“I am. Tell me about this girl that you are not NOT dating.”

“Well, she coaches the girls basketball at the Y while I’m working with the boys.”

“Sounds promising. She at least likes basketball. That’s a start.”

“She likes to eat too.”

“Ooh. Impressive. Two common interests.”

“She’s tall. A little taller than Sam, I think. She’s a senior at North Lima and the center on the girls’ basketball team.”

“Mmm hmm.”

“She has pale blue eyes. And hair that’s kind of wavy. It’s light or medium brown. She always has it in high pony like the Cheerios.”

“Okay.”

“She’s not skinny.”

“I’d imagine she’s pretty muscular.”

“Yeah.” Finn couldn’t keep the gleam out of his eye.

“Why aren’t you dating this girl, who I assume does actually have a name?”

“Trish Peterson.”

Kurt nodded.

“Well, she’s applying to colleges. I just don’t want to start something, and then end up with a broken heart.”

“Where’s she applying?”

“Toledo, Dayton, Columbus.”

“None of those places are that far from here. If you end up serious with her, there’s nothing preventing you from moving to one of those places at some point in time and getting a job or going to school yourself at some point in time.”

“I just look at myself and think ‘Why would someone so cool want to go out with me?’”

“Hey, now. None of that loser talk. Invite her over tonight if you want. Puck’s coming. Sam’s family will be here. Cassius and his wife and kids are coming. There will be too many people here for her to feel like she’s being put on display or something.”

“I’ll think about it. You didn’t answer about the shirts.”
“Oh. Um. This one.” Kurt picked one up. “You’re coming out with me for Black Friday shopping. You seriously need some other choices.” He picked a second one up. “Wear this one tomorrow.”

“Got it. Thanks. I think I do need some fashion lessons.”

Kurt went back downstairs and found Carole. “Mission accomplished.”

She laughed. “Thanks.”

“SAMMY!!!!!!!” Stacey launched herself at Sam and he managed to turn and to start running before she got close enough to jump on him. Once she chased him across the front yard a couple of times, she stopped and pouted. She stomped her foot and crossed her arms. “You’re bigger and faster and it’s NO FAIR! I just want to hug you. Hold still!”

“You hold still and I’ll come hug you.”

“Fine.”

He got close and squatted. “You have to be gentle with my hand still, remember. I ran so I wouldn’t have to try to catch you when you jumped up on me. I’m not allowed to lift anything that weighs as much as you do yet.”

“I forgot.”

“I know you did. It’s okay. Look.” He showed her his and how the scar was fading.

“You can’t see it much now,” she said.

“Nope, but the bad part about that is that people forget to be careful now, even me.”

“Really?”

“Yep.”

“I won’t forget again.” She reached for his other hand. “Let’s go inside.”

Dinner was a casual affair with people eating in the dining room, the kitchen, and a few downstairs. They had everything from grilled chicken and burgers to the vegetable soup Kurt had started that morning and the grilled sweet potatoes. There was a vegetable tray with dip, the coleslaw, chips, and a few of the desserts were put out. Finn got up the nerve to invite Trish over and she came. She got a quick introduction as the girls basketball coach at the Y before she was ushered downstairs to eat and play video games.

Steve and Stacey ended up downstairs as well, followed by Sam and Kurt. Stacey used her puppy eyes on him to put a princess braid in her hair.

“Oh, wow. That’s really pretty Stacey,” Trish said.

“Thanks. You could let Kurt do yours. It would look really pretty. I’ll even put a ribbon on the bottom for you, if you want.”

Trish smiled. “Well, I’d like to see how the braid would look, but you can keep your ribbons
because I don’t live near you and I wouldn’t want you to leave one behind.”

“Okay.” She got up.

Kurt offered, “I’ll do it if you want me to.”

“Really?”

“Sure. One French braid? Two? A princess braid, as Stacey calls it?”

“How about just one French braid? I’ve always wondered how it would look.”

“You’ve never had it French braided?”

She shook her head. “There’s a first time for everything, right?” She grabbed her backpack and pulled out a brush. She took her high pony down and brushed through her hair.

“You hair is beautiful,” Stacey said.

“Thank you.” She sat on the floor in front of where Kurt was sitting and let him braid her hair while she watched Puck and Finn play COD. “Finn, look around! You’re going to get sniped. Upper right side!”

Kurt laughed and kept working on Trish’s hair.

“So, it’s your dad that’s married to Finn’s mom?”

“Yep. And Sam is my boyfriend and the two cute blond rugrats are his little brother and sister. The other two rugrats sitting on the floor behind the couch watching a movie with Stevie on my laptop belong to Cassius, who works at my dad’s shop.”

“Got it.”

Once Kurt finished, he fastened her hair band at the bottom. “Come on. I’ll get a second mirror so you can see the back.”

Trish got up and followed him.

When they got upstairs, he said, “Wait here, and I’ll be right back.” He ran upstairs and came right back down with a handheld mirror. “You can go in the half bath and see the back.” He handed her the mirror.

She left the door open when she went in. She turned with her back to the mirror and looked in the smaller mirror. “Oh, wow. It looks really pretty. I confess to never having been very girly, but that looks nice without being to froufrou or boring like it does when I just wear it down.” She came back out and gave him the mirror back. She pulled her phone out of her pocket. “Will you take a picture that mostly shows the braid, but so that you can still tell that it’s me?”

“Sure.” He took a couple of shots and gave her the phone back. “Help yourself to some dessert if you want. Or you can just go back downstairs. I’ll be back down in a few minutes.”

The Evans family took over Finn’s room for the night, so Kurt went downstairs to talk to Finn since he was sleeping on the couch down there for the night.
“So?”

“So what?”

“Did she have a good time? Do we pass the ‘you’re family is crazy, but they’re okay’ test?”

“She liked it here. It’s just her and her dad. I wish I could invite them both for tomorrow, but he doesn’t know about me yet. She was doing what I’ve been doing. You know, just sort of trying out dating.”

“I get that. So, have you moved past ‘trying out dating’?”

“Yeah. I asked her if she’d be my girlfriend tonight when I walked her out to her car. She said yes and we kissed.” His eyes gave away how much he liked her.

Kurt smiled. “Happy is a good look on you,” he teased. “And only living with her dad makes what she said about no one ever French braiding her hair make sense.”

“It looks pretty like that. I know she’s not all feminine and tiny like everyone thinks is super pretty.”

“That doesn’t matter, Finn. You know that. Someone could be voted the prettiest high school senior and not get along with you at all. It’s only about whether you like her, not whether other people thinks she’s pretty or whatever. She’s just bigger period. She’s not going to look dainty in anything. That doesn’t mean that she’s not attractive.”

“I know. I think she’s pretty, but she doesn’t believe me.”

“I had that problem. Talk to Sam about how he broke me of it.”

Finn laughed. “That sounds really weird. I’ll have to ask him.”

“So, you two are dating for real?”

“Yeah. Mom and Burt said I’m not grounded anymore. They said I shouldn’t have done what I did, but it was Reggie who hurt Santana on purpose. He hurt a teenager to attack an adult.”

“They’re right. But I hope you’ve learned about keeping private things private.”

“I have.”

“You can invite Trish to go Black Friday shopping with us.”

“She’s not big into shopping.”

“That’s because she can’t ever find anything nice in her size, but I know where to take her.”

“I’ll see.”

“Okay. I’m glad she had a good time.”

“Aren’t you going to tell me ‘I told you so.’?”

“I could, but I’ll pass this time. I told you happy looks good on you.” He picked up Finn’s pillow and whacked him with it. “You did good.”
Finn snatched his pillow back. “Thanks.”

Thursday morning, Carole and Mary got the turkey in the oven. Sam and Kurt worked on prepping the side dishes. Finn was in charge of slicing the desserts and sitting them out on the kitchen island. Stevie and Stacey were put in charge of setting the table. Dwight and Burt grilled some smoked pork chops to serve alongside the turkey instead of ham. They enjoyed all of the food and everyone ate until they were stuffed.

Stevie and Stacey spent the afternoon drawing and playing with Kurt and Sam in their room. Dwight, Burt, and Finn watched sporting events for a while. Mary and Carole sat in the living room and talked for a while.

“I miss him,” Mary said. “I cried for ages when I hung up from talking to him and he thought we didn’t care about him anymore. It’s my own fault. I should have taken the time to call him, but I didn’t want him to feel like we didn’t trust him and that we were checking up on him like he was a child. We should have just talked more to get things straightened out. It was all such a big mess. And I was so worried about him after he got beat up like that. People are just awful sometimes.”

“They are. He’s happy here. I know he misses all of you, but he is happy.”

“I know. That’s the only reason I’m not up there overseeing him packing up his stuff and coming home with us. He loves Kurt. Stacey has her eye out for the perfect white dress to wear to their wedding.”

“Is there something I should know about?”

“No. Stacey just knows someone who got a really beautiful white dress for a wedding and she wants one too.”

“I see. So, she’s planning ahead. Very cute. Hopefully, she’ll buy it a few sizes too big. I don’t think we’re ready for a wedding yet.”

“Well, I just keep letting her take pictures of the dresses with my phone. That way she can keep her ideas in a file on the computer at home.”

“Good idea.”

“They’d have to go somewhere along the East Coast to get married now anyway since it’s not legal here.”

“Don’t give them ideas on eloping. One of Kurt’s wedding planning ideas involves eloping, so he’s prepared already. He planned our wedding in a week. He has a whole collection of pre-planned ideas with coordinating colors and flowers, depending on the time of year and the location of the wedding.”

“I see.”

“He’s very thorough.”

“He’s good for Sam. They’re good for each other.”

“They are.”
Stacey, Stevie, Kurt, and Sam came down the stairs.

“It’s 4:30, like you said, Mommy, but I don’t want to leave,” Stacey said. She crawled up and sat on Mary’s lap.

“I know, honey, but we have to get home tonight and rest a little tomorrow and cook some more because we’re driving to Tennessee tomorrow evening to have a second Thanksgiving with everyone there.”

“I know. I want to do that too.”

Mary kissed her on the forehead. “Stevie, run downstairs and get Daddy, please.”

“Okay.”

“Up with you, little missy. You’re too big for me to stand up while holding you.”

Stacey got up. She stood in front of Carole for a minute, and then reached out and offered Carole a hug. Carole leaned forward and wrapped her arms around Stacey.

“Thank you for being a nice mommy to Sammy. I miss him, but I know he likes it here with Kurt.”

Carole barely contained the tears. “You’re welcome, honey. We love him too. Maybe we can find a way for you to see each other more often.”

Stacey nodded and let go of Carole. She went and stood by the door and faced away. She wiped her eyes.

Sam knelt behind her. He held her coat for her to slip her arms in, and then wrapped his arms around her and spoke gently to her. “I’ll talk to Mom about letting you and Stevie use her computer to video call me and you’ll be able to see me when we talk. Will that be better?”

She turned and wrapped her arms around his neck, held on tight, and nodded. He kissed the top of her head before he stood back up.

Stevie and Dwight came up the stairs, followed by Burt. The adults said their goodbyes as everyone else put their coats on. Sam hugged Stevie before he got out the door. Kurt and Sam stood on the porch and waved as they drove away. Kurt pulled Sam into a hug before they went back inside.

Trish climbed in the backseat with Finn. “Oh, my God, Finn. You did not tell me your brother was a sadist. ‘Do you want to go shopping with us?’ sounded like more fun before I realized how freaking cold and dark it is at 5:00 in the morning.”

“I know. He said ‘early’. I didn’t know he meant before the roosters get up.”

“Good morning, Trish.”

“It will be morning at some point AFTER I’ve had coffee.”

“Look in the drink holder. Just the way you like it.”

She took a sip. “I take back the sadist part. But God, it’s early. Where on earth are we going so early?”
“Kohl’s.”

“I’ve been there, done that, found nothing.”

“You were looking in the wrong place.”

“If you say so. I have money from my dad and he told me that he’ll give you a bonus if I come back looking like a girl.”

Kurt laughed. “I’ve been offered the same if I would come back looking like a boy.”

She laughed. “I like those outfits that I sent you pictures of. I’m not sure my dad will think I look like a girl in them, but if you braid my hair fancy, it might help.”

“I’ll work on that while we stand in line.”

Finn said, “In line? We have to leave this early to stand in a line? This isn’t an NBA game or something. It’s a freaking clothing store.”

“With big, big discounts this morning, but only for two hours. So, people get there early to be sure to get what they want.”

“Ugh.”

“I brought the rest of the snickerdoodles so you can keep your energy up.”

“Really? I thought they were gone.”

“Nope, I hid some back.”

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“So, you want me and Sam to stand in line, as placeholders?”

“Yes. Trish and I will bring you stuff, and you’ll stand in line and hold it for us. We’ll get out of here a lot faster.”

“Whatever, dude, but I get some of the cookies when we leave.”

“Deal.”

Kurt took Trish’s hand and led her to a display of folded v-neck t-shirts. “Pick the colors you like. Grab a medium and a large in each so we don’t have to come back. Pick somewhat lighter colors.”

She picked up pink, cornflower blue, red, pale jade, turquoise, and peach. He took her hand again and led her to the jewelry section. Find something with a pendant that you like that will go with everything. Stainless. Not gold. She looked through everything and found a cute owl pendant necklace. Next, he led her to the ladies fitting room.

“Put one of the t-shirts on and let me see.”

She came out after she had put the pink one on.

“Are you willing to hang them to dry?”

“Do I have to?”
“No, but if you’re not willing to hang them to dry, we’ll need to order talls from the kiosk instead because they’ll shrink in length when you dry them and you said you don’t like short t-shirts.”

“I’ll think about it.” She left the larges behind and followed Kurt.

“Pick out some fun multicolored socks that go with the shirts. It will be easier if each pair has more than one color that goes with the shirts.”

She picked two multipacks. She handed everything to Finn as they walked past them to get to the shoes.

“Do you own any Chucks?”

“Nope. Just basketball and running shoes.”

“No boots?”

“I have hiking boots. Brown leather, waterproof.”

Kurt grabbed a couple of boxes off the shelf and handed them to her. “See which ones fit and if they’re comfortable. If not, we’ll move on to the Vans.”

She put one of each on. “Meh.”

“Alright.” He grabbed a couple of boxes of black and navy blue vans and took them over. “Black or navy blue?”

“Ooh. I like the blue.” She pulled them out and tried them on. “I think I’ll need to switch the socks though. I like these though. More comfortable. She put the mate on and walked around. She tossed her trainers in the box and walked back to the socks and picked two different multipacks with navy backgrounds instead of the black ones she had before.

They found Sam and Finn in line and Kurt took the black socks from Finn. Trish stood in line with them and changed her shoes back to the ones she had been wearing. She took her coat back from Sam.

“You two are good at this, you know,” she teased.

Kurt came up on Sam’s other side. “Pick two, Finn.” Kurt held up four button-up long sleeved shirts.

Finn pointed to two of them.

Kurt handed them to him and went to put the other two back. When he came back, he asked Trish. “So, you’ve decided to air dry the tees?”

“I guess. They can’t take that long to dry, right?”

“A day or so.”

“I have to hang the cardigans up to dry anyway, right?”

“Definitely.”

“Well, then I’ll just hang the t-shirts too. Why not?”
Fifteen minutes later, they were back in the Navigator.

“I get it now,” Finn said. “She saved $20 because we each had a $10 off before 8:00 coupon. And I saved $20 on my two shirts. And it only took like an hour because we stood in line while you looked for everything.”

“Exactly. Old Navy is next.”

They put their trays down on the table and plopped into their chairs.

“So, what do you think?” Kurt asked.

“Well, the 5:00am start time wouldn’t be on my list of things to redo very often, but in five hours of shopping, even with the long lines, I accomplished more than I’ve ever managed on my own or with any of my friends. They just go to the juniors department and buy cute girly stuff that I neither like nor comes in my size. I don’t mind looking like a girl because I am a girl, but the stuff they wear, no thanks.”

Finn and Sam weren’t talking. Finn was practically inhaling his food. He saw Kurt look at him with an eyebrow raised, and he took smaller bites and chewed more, causing Kurt to laugh. When they finished, they went to Trish’s house.

“Dad, this is my boyfriend, Finn. His brother Kurt, and Kurt’s boyfriend, Sam.”

“Nice to meet all of you. Call me Rob. Mr. Peterson is my father.”

“It’s nice to meet you,” Finn said. He shook hands with Rob.

“Let’s see you in the clothes. No bonus if you still look like you got dressed in the athletic store at the mall. You have enough track pants,” he teased.

Kurt went to Trish’s room with her. He helped her lay out everything she had gotten. “I’d go with the medium wash jeans, the pink tee, and the navy blue cardigan. Don’t forget the necklace and a pair of the socks.”

“Right.”

“I’ll go wait with the rest of them.”

Ten minutes later, she came out and did a runway walk through the living room for them.

“Well, I’ll be. That looks great. Not a bit of frilly froufrou anywhere, and it’s very flattering. Where did you find stuff that fits here in Lima?”

“Kohl’s, Old Navy, and TJ Maxx. Kurt knows where all off the girly guys clothes are.”

“So, they’re men’s clothes?”

“Yep.”

“Well, I like them. What else did you get?”

“Five more t-shirts like this one in different colors. Two other cardigans – plum and gray. Everything mixes and matches. Three other pairs of jeans like these, but in different washes –
meaning lighter and darker blue. And a couple of funky hoodies that I can wear with my track pants that don’t look like baggy boys’ hoodies. Obviously the shoes.” She pulled her jeans up. “And funky socks. Oh, and this cute owl necklace.”

“And you got all that for the money I gave you?”

“Yep.”

“How did you get all that for $200? I figured you’d come back with two outfits at most.”

Finn spoke up, “It’s Kurt. He’s magical.”

Sam laughed. “He’s kind of right. Kurt has like this photographic memory for seeing stuff places, and then when he knows what someone wants, he can remember where he saw it for the best deal. Plus, there were huge sales today early in the morning. We got like $20 off the tees. And Kurt had a 20% off coupon. And the jeans were buy one, get one half-off, on sale for $20 each, until like 9:00am.”

“I see. Well, you’re all welcome to hang around and watch the game. Or go out and do whatever you were going to do.”

“We’re eating cake and then going out to the movies,” Trish said.

“Have fun.”

“Come on. The kitchen’s this way.”

“Hugo even about?” Finn asked. “And why does Kurt get to pick the movie?”

“Because my dad liked my new clothes, and so do I. It’s his reward for doing an amazing job of finding things I will actually not feel stupid wearing in public.”

“Fine. Next time, we’re going to see MI:4 when it comes out in a couple of weeks.”

“Ooh. I want to see that too,” she said.

Sam said, “Me too.”

“I’ll go get the tickets,” Kurt said. He had the $40 Rob had given them to go out to the movies.

Sam followed along behind Kurt and stood in line with him. Finn and Trish waited near the entrance to the concession area.

“You didn’t get new clothes because you thought I didn’t like your other ones did you? Because I already think you’re pretty and it doesn’t matter whether you wear track pants and hoodies or the new stuff you got, which I do like, but”

She interrupted him. “I got the new clothes because my dad said that I needed to find another style that was ‘me’ besides clothes from the athletic store when school started. He said people wouldn’t take me seriously as an adult if all I ever wore were hoodies, track pants, and running shoes. I’ve gone to look for clothes plenty of times and come up empty handed, so I still had the money from back in September when he first gave it to me. You said Kurt was good at shopping. I figured why not give it a shot? It couldn’t go any worse than my other attempts, and at least you would be there to make it a little more fun. And it turns out that Kurt and Sam are hysterical and I like what I
bought. And thank you for saying that you think I’m pretty.”

“No need to thank me. It’s true.” He stepped a little closer and wrapped his arm around her waist. “The owl necklace is cute.”

“I realized it’s a watch when we were standing in line to pay for everything.” She separated the wings and showed him the watch face.

“Oh, that’s cool.”

“It’s even upside down so that when I look at it while wearing it, it’s right side up.” She closed it. “How long have Kurt and Sam been together?”

“Um. Since before spring break. Early March, I guess. Sam wasn’t out when they first started dating.”

Kurt walked up. “Got the tickets. Let’s go.”

Once they were seated, Kurt pulled a bag of candy out of his coat pocket.

“Awesome,” Finn said. “Hey, wait. Is this the rest of the Halloween candy?”

“Could be,” Kurt said.

“Whatever. Thanks, dude.”

“Share with Trish.” He reached over Finn and gave Trish the change from buying the tickets. “Tell your dad thanks for us, okay?”

“Sure.”

“Wake up, sweetie.”

“Mmf. Should be illegal.”

“What should be illegal?”

“Making us go to school on Sunday.”

Kurt kissed Sam on the top of his head.

“Schue’s a thief.” He nuzzled in tighter. “He’s stealing my Sunday snuggles. That should be illegal too.”

“I’ll give you extra snuggles later.”

“Mmf.”

“If you lie there complaining much longer, you’ll miss out on something else you really love.”

“Nope. Not letting that happen.” He started kissing up Kurt’s neck, licking him just enough to make him giggle.
“Blaine, Mike, Sam – move to the front. Quinn, Kurt, Tina – move to the first riser step. Let’s start again.”

It was nearly noon and they were all tired.

“Feed us and we might move again. Maybe we’ll even sing for you,” Kurt sassed as he sat down on the riser.

“Kurt, get up.”

“No. Feed us. We’ve been here four hours. We’re hot and tired and hungry.”

“You should have brought lunches.”

“You should have had us working on this for the last 14 weeks of school. Or at least 10 weeks. That would have been 50 hours.”

“You’ve already exceeded your allotment of insubordination.”

“You’ve exceeded my patience. I thought making Glee a class would make us more competition ready, not less ready. If you won’t order something in and feed us, I’m going home to eat lunch. I’ll be back at 1:30.” Kurt stood up. He walked over to Sam and took his hand to leave together.

“Kurt, get back in your place.”

“Or what? You’ll kick me out? Get another band member to replace me? I have finals at OSU Lima starting in 7 days. I have a final project to work on. I have an English paper to write. I have math formulas to study. I have a French paper to revise. You’ve had all semester to work on this. You asked us to come in on a Sunday. Either feed us or I’m going home to eat. Make up your mind.”

“If you don’t return to your spot, I will give you an F. Broadway actors do not just walk out and go home.”

“Did you learn that this past summer? I’ve been telling Rachel that for more than two years and you never backed me up before. She’s walked out numerous times. What punishment did she get? None. She even got rewarded. She hadn’t even practiced and you let her have the lead during our first Invitationals. Your bias is showing again.”

“Kurt.”

“I’ll stay because I don’t want an F.”

When Mr. Schue finally let them leave at 4:00, he approached Kurt. “I’d like to talk to you in my office.”

“No thanks.”

“If you refuse, I’ll call your parents and ask for a parent-teacher conference.”

“Alright. 7:30. Before school on Thursday. We’ll all be there.”

Kurt walked in the door and immediately called out, “Carole?”
“Yeah, honey? I’m in the kitchen.”

Kurt cut through the dining room. “Parent-teacher conference with Mr. Schue Thursday at 7:30, before school.”

“Alright, honey. What on earth could you have done to get in trouble?”

“Mr. Schue called a mandatory rehearsal at 8:00 and just now let us leave. No lunch break. Didn’t provide us anything to eat. I’m starving. I sassed him and said I was coming home to get lunch and he threatened to flunk me if I left the stage.” Kurt opened the fridge and started pulling out leftovers. He made three plates of food.

“I see.”

Finn came in the door. “Mom?”

“In here, Finn.”

“Then he lectured me about how Broadway actors can’t just walk off stage. As if Rachel hasn’t diva-ed out who knows how many times, but he’s never said a word to her. But I ask for something like a lunch break or for him to order us pizzas, and suddenly I need a talking-to in his office, which I declined. He threatened the parent-teacher conference. I rebutted with a day and time. He’s had 14 weeks to get us ready for Sectionals. And he waited until week 14 to get started, which was Monday.”

Finn said, “Oh, good. Food. I don’t even care that it’s cold.” He picked up one of the plates and started eating. When he finished, he put more food on his plate and took it downstairs.

Sam came in and Kurt handed him a plate of warm food. He took it to the dining room and sat down. Kurt waited for his, pulled it out, and went to sit with Sam.

Carole followed him. “We’ll be there. Did the practice go well?”

“I think we look decent,” Kurt said. “But decent isn’t really what we need to beat the girls. I spied on them. They’re fantastic. And we saw the Warblers at their Sectionals. Also, amazing.”

“You’re awfully quiet, Sam,” Carole said.

“My foot hurts. I have a whopper of a blister on my heel. And I’m angry about the way Mr. Schue treats Kurt.”

“Try icing it to relieve the pain.”

“Good idea.”

“Come snuggle me, please.”

“Of course.” Kurt took his shoes off and snuggled up to Sam.

“My outfit looks amazing. Thank you for choosing something so awesome to make for me.”

“You’re welcome. I think it looks really good on you. I just need to read through the requirements about five more times to make sure I completed each one. And I still have to sew the leather cuffs on the coat.”
“The boot spats are coming along nicely too. Did you find a way to use a machine that can stitch through the leather?”

“I forgot to tell you. One of the ladies in my class has a machine that can do it. She’s letting me come over Tuesday evening. I’ll just come home from work, grab the coat, cuffs, and the spats, and then drive over there. Hopefully it won’t take too long and I’ll be back.”

“Excellent. I know you were getting worried about it.”

“I was.”

“Why am I here?” Finn asked.

“Because all of us went to your first football game this season. We are all going to Sam’s first swim meet this year. It’s a surprise. Now, come on.” Kurt pulled Finn into the pool area and looked around for his dad and Carole. He spotted them up in the stands.

Finn followed along and sat next to Kurt at the end of the row. “He won’t be able to see us up here.”

“That’s okay. You couldn’t see us in the stands. He’ll see us afterwards.”

A few minutes later, Trish walked up and Finn stood up to let her sit in the empty seat between him and Kurt. She hugged him before she walked past.

“Surprise!” Kurt teased. “I invited Trish to watch with us, even though she’s going to root for North Lima.”

“I’ll cheer for Sam, but only because he’s your boyfriend.”

“Fair enough,” Kurt said. “It’s good to see you. What did your friends think of your new look? I like the red shirt with the gray cardigan.”

“Oh, they were surprised and they all liked the outfit. They were jealous when I told them how many things I had gotten for $200. They’re also not-so-secretly jealous of my pockets that are big enough to put my phone in.”

Kurt laughed.

The announcer came over the PA and the meet started. An hour later, Kurt was waiting outside the locker room when Sam came out.

“Kurt!” Sam threw his arms around Kurt and hugged him tight.

“Congratulations!”

“I didn’t win.”

“But you did. You got in the pool and did your best. You’re new at this. The others have been competing for ages, I would imagine. You worked until you could get on the team and third place isn’t bad at all. There were 12 swimmers. You worked hard. Dad, Carole, Finn, and Trish are here too. We’re going out for celebratory dinner. They were still deciding where when I came over here.”
“I need to tell Coach Roz that I’m leaving with you guys. Come on.” Sam took Kurt’s hand and went out the doors toward the parking lot. Once he found her and let her know, he went back to where Kurt was waiting on the sidewalk.

Burt and Carole were in the Navigator waiting for them. Kurt hopped the back seat with Sam. Finn had gone with Trish. She had pulled up next to the Navigator while they were waiting. She followed Burt drove out of the parking lot and they ended up at a nice little Mexican place.

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Thursday morning, Sam went to the swimming pool for his regular before-school practice. Burt, Carole, and Kurt went to Mr. Schuester’s office. Kurt had filled them in the night before. Mr. Schuester was waiting for them. He looked surprised to see Principal Beiste approaching his office after the Hummels had come in and sat down. She opened the door and sat down next to Kurt.

“Shannon?”

“My presence was requested because Mr. and Mrs. Hummel have some concerns about your class.”

Burt was the first to speak. “My first question is what type of grade will the students in this class be receiving?”

“Regular grades. A, B, C, D, or F.”

Carole asked, “On what basis will the students be receiving these grades? Kurt, Sam, and Finn have said that you have not given any quizzes, tests, or assigned any papers.”

“On their in-class work.”

“Such as?” Carole asked.

“Their participation. Singing, dancing, performing.”

Principal Beiste asked, “And what kind of rubric do you have for that, Will? We all know that Finn is a terrible dancer. Rachel’s been sitting in class not singing most of the time. Mrs. Hummel says that according to her information, you started preparing for sectionals a week ago Monday. So, 13 weeks of school with no preparation for the only competition this semester? No quizzes, no tests, no papers, no assignments, and no work on competition pieces. I’m changing the grade for this class to pass/fail, and everyone in this class will pass. Am I understood?”

“Yes.”

“Is it true that you held an 8-hour rehearsal here in the school on Sunday and did not provide lunch, or tell the students that they would need to bring their own lunches?”

“They should have known to bring food.”

“It’s your responsibility to tell them what they need to bring when the cafeteria is not open.”

“They’re mostly 17 and 18 years old.”

“You’re what? 35? Age isn’t the issue here. You can’t just work high school students for 8 hours with no food. Do you want the school to be investigated?”

“Of course not.”
“Well, you not doing your job all semester won’t make that less likely. You helped Burt run a ‘Save the Arts’ in school campaign and your teaching methods are going to be the death of the arts in this school. Ms. Corcoran has lesson plans for every class she gives. Those girls have all learned to read music well. They’ve learned about key signatures, transposing, harmonies, and chords. I don’t even know what all of it means, but I’ve seen her lesson plans for teaching the stuff. Worksheets, quizzes, and tests. They’ve had to prepare solos and present them. They’ve written one paper on a composer or lyricist. Anyway, it’s not right that the kids in your class will get the same credit for doing nothing. But I can’t eliminate the class because it’s way too late for someone to switch to a new class since there’s only one week of classes before finals. Over winter break, you’ll write up a month’s worth of real lesson plans with quizzes, tests, or assignments. I’ll review them the Monday school starts again. If they’re not up to snuff, the New Directions kids will have to choose a new class to take first period or switch into Ms. Corcoran’s Troubletones section. And New Directions will go back to being an afterschool club where kids can meet up and sing for fun.”

“You’re serious?”

“I told you I was when I agreed to take you back this fall. You were a terrible Spanish teacher, Will. You know that. You’re not proving yourself to be a much better history or music teacher. I can’t justify your existence in this school if you aren’t going to teach the material.”

Burt said, “I know you wanted to discuss Kurt’s behavior, so let’s hear it. Exactly what has my kid done?”

“He’s insubordinate.”

“You wanna know what I think, Will. I think you’re not doing your job. I think Kurt’s tired of you not doing your job. I think Kurt’s reminding you to do your job and you don’t like it, so you thought you could intimidate him by threatenng to flunk him.”

“He’s never going to make it on Broadway. He needs to just realize that now and come up with something else he wants to do.”

Kurt spoke up. “That’s not for you to decide Mr. Schue. It’s your job to teach me to be the best performer you can. You aren’t producing or directing a show I’m auditioning for. It’s not up to you whether I make it or not. But sabotaging me is unreasonable. Who has the largest vocal range in the club? Who can sing the most varied music styles? Who can blend with everyone in the group? Who learned the Nationals choreography in a few hours by watching a video last year? Who learned all of the music in a weekend? I’m tired of your favoritism. I know that you think that Finn, Rachel, and Blaine hung the moon. But enough is enough. I do have one question. Who convinced you to give me the split lead on ‘ABC’? I know that would have never been your idea.”

“Quinn.”

“Oh, so Quinn has something on you? That’s interesting to know.”

“Kurt?” Principal Beiste said.

“Oh, nothing. Quinn is tight-lipped. She’ll never spill a good secret that she can use to her advantage.”

The warning bell rang.

“Well, this has been an interesting meeting,” Carole said. She stood up. “I guess we’ll see everyone
the day after tomorrow for Sectionals.”

Burt stood up and started to walk out, but then stopped. “I expected more of you, Will. You spent all that time working on my campaign and you’ve been shortchanging the very kids you’re supposed to be teaching? Get it together.” He left with Carole.

The New Directions practiced for an hour before school, 45 minutes during lunch, and two hours after school. On their way out of the building, Kurt caught up with Quinn.

“Thank you.”

“For what?” she asked.

“Getting me the split lead with you and Tina on ‘ABC’.”

“What makes you think I had anything to do with that?”

“I cornered Mr. Schue about it with my parents and Principal Beiste in the room.”

“I suggested that you be given the lead on ‘ABC’ and I suggested the Michael Jackson theme. We have almost all guys, but ‘ABC’ is from when Michael was young and it’s high enough that it’s a perfect fit for you and me and Tina. I had already divided the lines up with you and Tina getting the lion’s share. I’ve had a lead before.”

“That’s why you were so adamant that I not give up lines to Mike.”

“Yep. And you insisting that he and Rory be featured instead of a repeat of Artie and Blaine was perfect.”

“You have something on Mr. Schue.”

“You’re welcome,” she said, completely ignoring his statement. “You were there for me when I needed someone. You looked for me and reached out to me. I know we don’t hang out, but you’ve listened to me every time I needed someone to talk to. I appreciate that.” She sashayed off to her car and waved. “See you tomorrow!”

Sebastian, Dylan, Nick, Jeff, and Trish showed up Friday evening. Her dad agreed to let her sleep over. They baked pizzas, and then ate them while watching a movie in the family room. Once it looked like no one was eating any more pizza, Kurt carried the rest of it back upstairs. Not long after Kurt headed up, Trish took her glass up to get some more water. Kurt was wiping the counters down and putting the leftovers in the refrigerator.

“Did you want another slice of pizza before I put it away?”

“No. I’m good, but thanks.” She took her drink back downstairs.

Sam came up next. “You’ve been gone for a while. Are you okay?”

“I’m fine. I put the rest of the pizza away and cleaned up. It seemed like everyone was done eating.”

Sam stepped closer and took Kurt’s hands and moved them into slow-dance position. They danced
“What did you actually come up here for?”

“To check on you and to get the air mattress out for Dylan and Sebastian. Jeff brought theirs down when they got here.”

“Alright. Let’s go do that. I’m tired. The two of them and Nick and Jeff can stay up as late as they want, but we need to get some sleep.”

Carole, Kurt, and Sam prepped a breakfast burrito buffet line. Everyone went through the line and made burritos to their own liking. Burt came in and ate with all of them in the dining room.

“So, the competition starts at 1:00?” Burt asked.

“Yeah,” Finn answered. “We have to be there at 11:00 to practice. Everyone else is going to stay and watch a movie, and then come watch.”

Carole said, “You’re all coming back here afterwards, right?”

“Yep,” Finn answered. “Maybe some of the other New Directions. I didn’t invite anyone else yet though. I haven’t decided.”

“That’s fine. If you invite more people, just get them to bring some snacks. We have enough for everyone right now, but if you invite more people, we’ll need more.”

“Got it.”

The Unitards from Defiance, Ohio took the stage after intermission. Their lead singer did a fantastic job singing “Buenos Aires” and their dancing was great, but the rest of the group barely sang during the song.

The Troubletones were next. Mercedes, Santana, and Brittany were in the point position on the stage, wearing costumes that were reminiscent of the 1940’s war era girl’s groups. They began to sing and they killed the harmonies on “Candy Man”. The Cheerios and Sugar were wearing red dresses and were dancing and singing back up, looking and sounding perfect.

When the song ended, there was a brief silence followed by segment of drumming with no music on a blacked out stage. When the lights came up, the girls were in the center striking poses and ooh-ing along with the drumming. Santana, Brittany, and Mercedes entered the stage again in red dresses and took the point in the formation. Brittany was in the center slightly behind the other two. They had incorporated the newer Cheerios into their mash-up of “Rumor Has It” and “Someone Like You”. The crowd loved them.

The New Directions stood in the wings as the Troubletones exited. They took their places on the stage. As soon as they started to sing, the crowd got excited. Michael Jackson songs were definitely a way to the crowd’s heart. Tina, Kurt, and Quinn did a great job on ‘ABC’. Kurt wowed the crowd with his leapfrog jump over Mike. Mike got to show his dancing skills off as well. Sam pulled off his body rolls. Quinn’s opening to “Control” was effectively creepy. Blaine and Artie sounded great. The whole group managed to do the choreography without messing up too much. “Man in the Mirror” looked great with the focal lighting on the featured singers. When they finished
everyone cheered.

They exited the stage and waited for the top three to be announced. The New Directions had tied for first place just like the year before – this time with the Troubletones.

They met together in the choir room afterwards.

Ms. Corcoran put her fingers to her mouth and whistled loudly to get everyone’s attention. Once they quieted down, she spoke. “Congratulations to both groups. You guys were all great. We’ll meet together Monday morning and discuss our options for Regionals. Enjoy the rest of your weekend.”

The din slowly built to its previous level. People were talking about going out to celebrate in clumps here and there. The Troubletones left a few minutes later to go back to where their clothes were.

Kurt made his way to Finn. “You can do what you want. Trish is waiting with Bas and everyone. What do you want me to tell her?”

“I don’t know what to do. Rachel’s hanging around and she keeps looking at me with those longing puppy eyes she gives me when she’s sad. I feel bad that she’s sad, but she chose to stuff the ballot box and not getting to sing was her punishment for it. And I’m not in the mood for her to find out that I have a girlfriend today.”

“So, we’ll all go home. That was the original plan. The 8 of us at the house.”

“Right. We’ll change and go home. I’ll text her to just go ahead with the other four. The three of us came in my truck. She can’t fit with us anyway.”

“Let’s get changed then.”

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“Wow, this looks great.” Kurt looked at everything on the island. “You were busy while we were practicing. Thanks.”

“I had help. Sebastian helped me chop everything up. Dylan helped with browning all of the meat.”

“I’ll thank them too.” Kurt grabbed a bowl and got in line. He made himself a huge taco salad and went in the dining room. He sat down in between Sam and Sebastian. “Carole said you and Dylan helped. Thanks.”


“We had already seen the movie that Jeff brought. He and Nick and Trish hadn’t seen it. So, we decided we should actually be useful,” Sebastian said.

Sam asked, “So, board game tournament after we eat is still the plan, right? Since Finn didn’t invite other people over, we can do it in here like we had planned.”

Kurt nodded and continued to eat.

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Jeff got everyone’s attention. “Before we go, we want to see Sam in his outfit that he’s bragged about to each of us at least once.”
Kurt looked at Sam and raised an eyebrow in question.

“Sure. Give me a few minutes.” Sam headed upstairs.

While he was gone, everyone stacked all of the games up neatly and helped carry them back downstairs and put them away. They went back up to the living room to wait for Sam. A few minutes later, he came down the stairs.

Trish wolf whistled when he walked through the doorway. “Now, THERE’S my style. You think people would take me seriously if I dressed like that?”

Kurt laughed. “I’m sure they would.”

“I’m in,” Dylan said.

“Me too,” Jeff said.

“We all want an outfit like that,” Nick said. “You can start a line of clothing. We’ll be your first customers.”

“Look up Steampunk clothing or Cyberpunk. You’ll find quite a bit of variety, but all in this general ‘look’.”

Trish said, “I’ll do that. Nothing against the jeans, tees, and cardigans, which I really do like, but my dad says I need some nicer clothes. Dressier ones. I haven’t had my senior pictures done yet. I need THAT outfit for my senior pictures.” She got up and stood close to Sam and batted her eyes. “Sam, dear. We’re the same height pretty much. I’m certain that your outfit will fit me too. I bet the boots will even fit me. Can I borrow it to have my picture take in?”

Sam laughed at her and shook his head. “I’m a sucker for puppy eyes. Sure.”

“I’d hug you, but I wouldn’t want Kurt to rip my arms off if I wrinkled anything before it gets graded.” She stuck her tongue out at Kurt.

“Oh, sure. Butter him up and stick your tongue out at me,” he sassed. “See if I MAKE you anything or ever tell you where to buy the clothes you want the next time you need a new outfit.”

“Like you could resist. You LOVE playing dress up.”

Jeff teased him. “She’s got you there, Kurt. We all know you can’t resist the words ‘I need a new outfit.’ It’s like crack and you know it.”

“Fine, fine,” he sighed. “You all know me too well. You can’t borrow it until after it gets graded on Tuesday. After that, it’s 100% Sam’s to do with as he pleases.”

“Yay!!”

“Although, I’m not really sure that space cowboy was the look your dad had in mind for your senior pictures.”

“He might have mentioned the word ‘dress’ right before I walked out of the room.”

Kurt laughed.

While Sam went back up to change, Trish took her phone out and looked up “Steampunk dress” and got Kurt to sit next to her. “Oh, now see, I would absolutely wear that dress. And that one too.”
She showed the pictures to Kurt. “Can you make one of these?”

“Yes, but not until after finals. It won’t be cheap though. That fabric is expensive.”

“Well, I’ll show my dad. I have my own money too. So, it just depends. We’ll talk about it.”

Sam came back down.

“Okay,” Sebastian said. “I hate to leave, but we have to go back to Dalton. Unlike you public school heathens, our teachers make us do enormous amounts of work and we all have finals a week from Monday.”

“Sam and I have finals starting this Monday, so we have to get busy too. I’m glad you guys all came.”

There were hugs all around and the guys took off.

Finn got Trish’s coat out of the closet and handed it to her. She grabbed her bag. “See you two. I had fun.”

“Bye,” Kurt and Sam both said.

“We’re going out. I won’t be back until late,” Finn said. “Mom knows.”

“See ya,” Sam said.

Monday morning during Glee, there were a lot of conversations taking place at once. Kurt and Sam quietly gave Ms. Corcoran a pass for them to leave. She nodded. They stopped by Miss Pillsbury’s office for an official pass to leave the school building so that Sam could still participate in the swim meet that afternoon.

The two of them went to campus and met up with their instructor. Sam sat down at the laptop he was allowed to use for tests and competed the essay and short answer portion of the exam before the other students arrived. He saved his answers and gave the laptop back to the instructor. He took his seat next to Kurt. When the class period started, Sam had the whole time to complete the reading passages with multiple choice answers and the portion that was multiple choice that dealt with vocabulary and grammar. He circled his answers on the exam itself. After everyone left, he went to the front, and turned his exam in.

“I’m sorry that I make everything harder on you. I know everyone else’s tests can go through the scantron machine or whatever they call them here.”

“Sam, don’t worry about it. You’re one of the hardest working students in this class. I don’t mind hand-grading your work. How is your hand doing?”

“It’s better. I can write now, but not nearly fast enough to answer questions on a test. And it’s about the size of second grader, but its getting better. I’m not going to give up. At least it’s legible, so I can make to-do lists and stuff like that. My math final is tomorrow and my instructor is just sending me to the homework help center to have my test proctored. So, someone there will fill in the dots for me.”

“Ah, I see where your reticence is coming from. I’m not so new-fangled that I haven’t ever graded written work. Back in the day, I graded all of the tests by hand.”
Sam smiled. “I’ve enjoyed this class. The books were interesting and listening to other people talk about them was interesting too. In high school, it was mostly just sit in our seats and listen to the teacher tell us why the book was important and what we were supposed to get out of reading it, plus being asked minute details about the books on tests. That was always hard for me because just reading the book for the big picture was already such a struggle. For this class, I listened to the audiobooks and followed along with the printed books. It really helped.”

“Well, what you said about your high school classes doesn’t really surprise me. A lot of teachers resort to putting questions like that on tests because students will skip reading the books in favor of reading the Cliff Notes summaries of the chapters, or they’ll watch a movie adaptation of the book. Those types of questions attempt to weed out the students who didn’t actually read the book itself, but I can see how for a student who struggles so much to read the text that those questions would be infuriating after you did take the time and put the effort into reading the book.”

Sam nodded. “I won’t keep you. I’m sure you had a deadline to get those exams graded.”

“I do. It was nice to have you in class.” She looked up to where Kurt was sitting. “You too, Kurt.”

He smiled. “Thanks.”

Kurt and Sam presented their oral report Tuesday morning in their US Government class. After class, they left McKinley and went straight to the college campus.

They waited for Kurt to be called into the classroom to be graded. Once inside, Sam changed in the dressing room. When he came out, Kurt’s instructor examined how well the ensemble fit Sam.

Once Sam finished modeling the outfit, he went back into the fitting room, took it off, and hung it up. He redressed and handed it to Kurt. He gave Kurt a quick kiss where the instructor couldn’t see. He whispered, “Just relax. It’s amazing. I love you. I’ll see you in 30 minutes or so. I’ll be waiting to have my painting evaluated. If you get there and I’m not outside the room, just wait for me.”

“Okay.” Kurt kissed him again quickly and turned to go back to the classroom. He hung the three pieces on the rack and placed the accessories that could be hung down from the pieces that would be graded. He placed the boots under the ungraded accessories.

“You took on a very risky project. The others in this class chose much simpler projects.”

Kurt sat and attempted to maintain a reasonable amount of eye contact. “Should I have chosen something less complex? I didn’t see any guidelines on what we could and couldn’t choose.”

“Oh, no. It’s really quite fantastic. When you turned in your choice back after midterms, I actually looked the show up and watched it. I quite liked it. And the clothing was really something.”

“It’s one of Sam’s favorite shows. Sam was my model.”

“Yes. So, how these reviews go is I will look over the garment construction and mark the sheet that you have already seen. If I have any questions while I’m examining the pieces, I will ask. If not, once I’m done, we’ll go over the details.”

Kurt nodded.

She got out of her seat and took the rubric sheet fasten to a clipboard with her. She took each one of his pieces and laid it out on the cutting table to examine it. Once she was finished, she hung them
all back up. She looked over his accessories and wrote some comments on the back of his sheet.

“Well, you clearly followed the directions very carefully. You fulfilled each one of the requirements. Tell me about how you designed the coat.”

Kurt explained his technique.

“Your idea for the boots was quite creative. That leather coat you bought was just sad. But you’ve given an old dilapidated piece a brand new life as the cuffs on the coat, as well as the majority of the construction of the boot. Of course, the danger you run into with the way you’ve constructed the boots is that you’ll have to watch for separation of the leather you’ve glued on. I was particularly impressed with the fact that you stitched the leather around the edges the way it would have been stitched before you glued the two parts together creating the effect that the two parts are actually sewn together.”

“Thank you.”

“You spent less than $20 and they are nearly replicas of the boots from the show. Of course, that doesn’t count for your grade, but I wanted to compliment you on your creativity and spend thriftiness. That will come in very handy if you ever do work on costuming a production.”

Kurt nodded.

“Now, to your grade. As I said, you fulfilled all of the requirements and you did so quite well. I don’t see any loose stitches or places that are puckered. Your construction techniques that were beyond what was required area all top notch. Your final grade on this project is 100.”

Kurt’s eyes went wide. “Really?”

“You are a very talented designer and tailor, Kurt. You’ve done a great job.”

“Thank you.”

“If you haven’t already considered it, I would give some serious consideration to double majoring. I know that you listed musical theatre on your intended field of study at the beginning of the semester, but since you are a senior in high school and will have quite a few college credits when you start college next fall, that may leave you with the potential of being able to pursue a double concentration, giving you more career options in the future.”

“I’ll think about it. I really enjoyed this class.”

“I hardly see how there was anything new to you.”

“It wasn’t necessarily that I learned a lot, although I did learn new things. It was that I was treated respectfully by you and the other students. I’m sure that you can imagine that a male teenager in this town with a penchant for fashion and clothes that are unusual isn’t the most widely accepted person. So, just being in a room where no one acted like I was unwelcome or too weird was just nice. Getting to do something I really enjoy with a group of people who didn’t mind me being here was a pleasant change.”

“Well, you’ll find as you get out of this small town and more involved in the theatre world, there are more unusual people who will value your talent and skill. Trust me on that.”

“Thank you for your time. I know that Mallory is waiting. I saw her peek in the window to see whether she should come in.”
“Have a good break.”

“You too.” Kurt packed everything in his garment bag and went to where Sam was waiting for him. He didn’t have any way to hug Sam, but he walked straight up to him and kissed him, pleasantly surprising Sam. “I got a 100. A perfect score. She loved it.”

“That’s awesome. It is a great outfit. I really do love it. I’m up next. I hope my review goes well too.”

Sam’s name was called a couple of minutes later. He picked his painting up and went inside the office. Kurt sat on the bench and waited for him to come back out.

“Welcome, Sam.”

“Thanks.” Sam put his painting on the easel and stepped back.

“Tell me about this painting.”

Sam told about what inspired him and about the location.

“So, you didn’t do it from a photo?”

“No, sir. I did it from memory. It’s a place, but it’s also the feeling of the place.”

“Well, the feeling I get from this painting is very warm and it’s somehow comforting to look at it. I would definitely hang it up and enjoy looking at it.”

“Thanks.”

“Tell me about your hand. Is it getting better?”

Sam answered him.

“Well, I am really pleased with your work this semester. You’ve overcome a lot of obstacles to do well. You followed the directions on this work and it’s really lovely. I’m giving you full marks. I hope you continue to pursue painting. And I hope you get back to where you can paint without so much difficulty. Your perseverance is commendable.”

“Thank you.”

“Before you leave, I just need to photograph it here in my office to show that I’ve seen it and so I can put with the rest of your file.” He photographed the painting. “You’re free to take it now. Happy holidays.”

“Thanks. To you too.”

Sam came out of the office with a huge smile on his face. He put the painting in the carrier he had brought it in. “Come on.” He led Kurt out of the building. He stopped about 10 feet outside the door and turned to Kurt and kissed him quickly. “I got 100 too. He liked it a lot.”

“Excellent.” This calls for a celebration of some sort.

Sam leaned in very close and spoke directly in Kurt’s ear. “Naked snuggles.”

Kurt leaned away just enough that he could kiss Sam. “Sounds great, except that we both have math finals to take before we can go do that.”
“Stupid math final.”

Kurt laughed. “Come on. I need to put this stuff in the back of the Navigator and we need to grab our lunches.”

Kurt stayed home from school Wednesday to study for his French final later that morning. Once he took it, he went to the shop to work extra hours to have spending money for the holidays. He worked until 2:45, and then went back to McKinley for an emergency Glee meeting.

He got to the auditorium and Rachel was finishing up a song and then talking about her naked ears when Kurt walked in and sat down.

“We begin in the Swiss Alps, in the village of Gstaad, in the perfectly-appointed living room of Kurt Hummel and Blaine Anderson’s chic swank chalet. The tree towering and opulent. The fireplace draped in garland. The stockings bejeweled. Kurt and Blaine, the perfect hosts, have invited their friends to drop in for an evening of Noël Coward-esque banter and fun, happy cheer-filled songs.”

Rachel whined, “Are you telling me that I’m not invited for Christmas?”

“Not unless you pick a happier song.” Artie continued, “The evening’s festivities conclude with Rory, dressed as Christmas elf Itchy, reciting ‘Frosty the Snowman.’ Start with fun, end with fun. That’s how you do it, kids.”

Sam interjected, “The Frosty story isn’t fun. At the end, he melts and dies.”

“I’m rebooting frosty. In my version, he doesn’t melt. He… Well, new pages forthcoming.”

“What’s wrong with a story that’s a little sad or a song that’s a little depressing?” Sam asked. “I mean, that’s part of Christmas too, right? It’s the sad things that make you remember what’s really important.”

“Sorry, Sam, but the phrase is “Merry Christmas,” not “Morose Christmas.” That’s the vision. That’s what you have to buy into.”

“Well, sorry, Artie. I’m not buying into it. I’m gonna go downtown, see if I can ring one of those Salvation Army bells. Come on, Rory. I’ll give you a ride.”

“I should memorize my part, Sam.”

Sam left the auditorium. Kurt wanted to get up and follow him, but he also wanted to hear more about the special. The lure of getting the lead in a televised production was too much to just walk away from without hearing the details. After the meeting ended, Kurt talked to Artie, and then went back to work.

When Kurt got home from work, he looked all over the house for Sam and couldn’t find him. “Carole?” he said as he knocked on the master bedroom door.

“Yes, honey?” she said as she opened it.

“Do you know where Sam is? I’ve tried texting him, but he’s not answering and he’s not here
anywhere.”

“Oh, he’s at Brittany’s. He said he was going to spend time with Rory.”

“Oh, okay. Did he say when he was coming back?”

“He had an overnight bag with him. I thought there was some kind of Glee sleepover or something. He doesn’t need my permission to come and go, so I didn’t ask any other questions.”

“Thanks.”

Kurt spent the evening studying for his US Government final. Since Sam was going to get extra time on his exam, they talked to Mr. Sanchez and arranged to take the exam on Friday instead of the following Tuesday. Sam would spend the classroom time and the following hour taking the exam in an empty classroom with Tina as his scribe. This arrangement would allow her to take her exams as scheduled the following week. Kurt was to stay after class and take his exam then during Mr. Sanchez’s planning period.

At 10:00, Kurt put his book, study sheet, and note cards away. He laid his clothes out for the next day and got in the shower. He put pajamas on, did his moisturizing and got in bed. He curled up on his side and began to cry. He tried calling again. His call went straight to voicemail.

“I miss you, Sam. I love you. I don’t know why you left me. Please come home to me.”

He eventually cried himself to sleep.

A little after midnight, Sam knelt next to Kurt’s side of the bed. “Kurt,” he said quietly. He ran his thumb across Kurt’s lips. “Kurt.”

“Sam!” He sat up and nearly fell to the floor on his knees and hugged Sam.

Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt. “I’m so sorry. I came home after I decided to not ring any bells. I grabbed a bunch of the board games from downstairs and put them in my duffle and I went to Brittany’s to try to cheer Rory up. He’s really down and missing his family. He’s not going to get to see them for Christmas.” He let go a little and stood up and pulled Kurt up and they sat side by side on the bed. “I wasn’t thinking and I left my satchel in my truck and my phone was in there. I went inside thinking that as soon as you got home, you’d call when I wasn’t here and I’d tell you where I was and to come over and play games with us. But you never called. I figured something must have kept you late at the shop. We played games for a while and then watched a movie, and that’s when I fell asleep. They just covered me up and left me on the couch. I woke up and I put everything in my truck and saw my bag in the seat. I saw you had texted me asking me where I was when you got home. And then there were 10 voicemails. The first 9 you hung up and the 10th one broke my heart.”

“I thought you were mad at me because I stayed to hear Artie out. I thought you didn’t want to see me. You tried to get Rory to leave with you and then when Carole told me that you had gone to spend the night with him, I didn’t know what to think.”

“Carole thought I was spending the night?”

“The duffle.”
“Oh. She thought I had clothes in it, which would make more sense than guessing that there were games in it. I’m so sorry, Kurt. I love you and even if I am ever mad at you about something, I won’t just run off and go spend the night with someone else without telling you. I told you I wouldn’t do the passive/aggressive thing. But I can totally see how it looked like I did. I’m sorry.”

Tears were still streaming down Kurt’s cheeks. “You came home. That’s what matters. I love you so much. I missed you. Studying government without you is boring.”

Sam laughed. “I love you too. I’m going to go jump in the shower and I’ll be right back, okay?”

“Okay.”

“You won’t need those pajamas to stay warm when I get back.” Sam kissed him on the cheek and rushed off to the bathroom.

By the time Sam got back, Kurt had put the pajamas in the laundry and had gotten back in bed. Sam scooted up behind him and wrapped his arm around him.

“I’m really sorry, Kurt. I know I already said that, but I really am.”

“I know, sweetie. I forgive you. I know you didn’t do it on purpose.”

“Rory sang ‘Blue Christmas’ in Glee this morning. He’s good, like really good. Then Santana, being the awful person she can be, insulted him. You’d think by now, she’d learn to keep her mouth shut, but no. I followed him to his locker after class and offered to be his Christmas sponsor for the week. That was the bell ringing idea – trying to inspire a feeling of happiness by doing something for someone less fortunate. But I got down there and they told me I’d need to wait a few minutes to talk with someone, so I sat down and picked up a brochure on the mission of the Salvation Army. Needless to say, after reading it, I left. I came home, picked up the games, and you know the rest after that. Oh, except I did help work out the misunderstanding Rory had about the Pierce’s Christmas vacation plans. Earlier I had told him that he could come home with me if he wanted to, you know to go see what it’s like in rural Kentucky, not that it’s that much different from here, but it turns out that the Pierce’s are going to New Mexico on vacation, so he will definitely want to do that because that will be really cool.”

Kurt wiggled and Sam scooted back. Kurt rolled over to face him. “I’m glad you helped them work out whatever he had misunderstood about it.” He moved closer and kissed Sam. He pressed in tentatively and Sam pulled him closer and deepened the kiss. When he pulled back to catch his breath, he kissed up Sam’s neck, up to his ear. “Please, let’s never fight. My heart broke when I thought you weren’t coming home because you were mad at me.”

“I promise no repeats of tonight. If I change our normal routine, I won’t wait for you to call me. I’ll call you and let you know. If I had just texted you when I decided to go to Brittany’s, none of this would have happened. I was aggravated that you stayed, but I wasn’t angry. You’re your own person. You have the right to be in or not be in something after you’ve heard the full details. I had heard enough to make up my mind, but after being shafted for the lead in the musical, I can see why you’d stick around to see what the lead would entail.”

“We have no idea whether we got into our first choices still. I thought a lead in a good TV show would be a good addition for my CV if I apply to more places later this month. But when I left, I told Artie to rewrite his vision with Rachel as Blaine’s partner at the Swiss chalet. After listening to the rest of his vision, I wasn’t interested. I’m definitely interested in snuggles though.” He scooted even closer and curled up on Sam. “Let’s go to sleep. I love you.” He brought Sam’s hand up to his lips and kissed it.
“I love you too.”
Chapter 26

Kurt woke up wrapped around Sam. He scooted as close as he could get. Sam stirred a bit and held on tighter. He kissed Kurt on the forehead.

“Mmm.”

“We have to get up soon. You have swim practice.”

He harrumphed and kissed Kurt again. “Cuddles.”

“Yes, cuddles for my cuddle bunny.”

“Cuddle bunny?”

“Well, cuddle monster didn’t seem very appropriate. Cuddlepus? Cuddly cutie? Koala cuddler?”

Sam laughed. He ran his index finger up Kurt’s ribs.

Kurt started squirming and giggling. “Hey!” He retaliated by licking Sam’s neck.

“Now, you know what that will start.”

“Mmm hmm. Something we don’t have time for unfortunately.” He gently kissed Sam’s neck. “Later, okay?”

“Definitely.”

Sam lay down on the bed and winked at Kurt and held his arms out with grabby hands.

“Didn’t we just get out of bed?” Kurt crawled into bed and caged Sam.

Sam started unbuttoning Kurt’s shirt. “That was four hours ago. No OSU classes and you don’t have to work today. It’s Thursday.”

“I’m scheduled from noon until 4:00.”

“How? Why? Thursday is your day off. I had plans on keeping you in bed for a long, long time. And then I was going to take you out to an early dinner. I stashed snacks up here to keep your energy up.”

“I didn’t know. Cassius asked me yesterday to fill in.”

“I know you didn’t know. That’s the whole point of a surprise.”

“I’m sorry, sweetie. I really am. I thought you had to go to campus this afternoon.”

“I do, but just to pick up my pottery pieces. I was going to grab them on the way to the early dinner.”

“Oh.” Kurt took Sam’s shirt off. “Let’s do whatever you had planned, just for a shorter period of
Sam slipped Kurt’s shirt off his shoulders and he sat up enough that Sam could get it off. “Well, there was more than one part. Do you want the sexy times part or the snuggles and watching the *Warehouse 13* finale part or the part where we talk about the holidays and make plans?”

“I’m so sorry. You put a lot of thought into your plan. I was enjoying the make-out we were starting. We can do the other things later and we can still go out to dinner after I get off work.” Kurt sat straddling Sam and started kissing along Sam’s jaw.

“Okay.”

Carole came into the kitchen to find them kissing while slow dancing. She had a bag of groceries in her hand.

“You two are adorable, you know,” said.

Kurt stepped back and pulled his phone out of his pocket and stopped the music. “Sorry. I know – PG in the rest of the house. I didn’t hear you come in.”

“That was PG. You’re fine. Don’t worry so much. Everyone has their clothes on with their hands visible,” she teased. “You two are good for each other. I’m not bothered. And Finn seems to have found a nice girl.”

Kurt turned and leaned back against Sam and wrapped Sam’s arms around him, putting his own over the top. “I like her,” Kurt said. “I think she’s a good match for Finn. She’s sassy, but in a funny way and she doesn’t talk over him or correct him all the time. Plus, she likes the same stuff he likes. Even if they don’t stay together, she’s makes him more confident and Quinn and Rachel had the opposite effect.”

“I agree. Who knows if they’ll stick it out past high school, but he’s seems a lot more himself when she’s around than he ever did with Quinn or Rachel. I see you’ve made soup. What else are you up to today?”

“I’m working from noon-4:00. Sam’s going to campus to pick up his pottery pieces.”

“Maybe be studying tonight. We’re taking our US Government final tomorrow.”

“We have all next week free. An extra week of winter break for us. We haven’t finalized our plans. That’s on our agenda too. Probably tomorrow morning after we finish the final.”

“Just let me know after you’ve decided. I’m not sure what we’re doing. Burt needs to go to DC and find a place to live while he’s there.”

Sam turned the heat off and put soup in two bowls. “Would you like some too?”

“Yes, please. It smells really good.”

He ladled out a third bowl.

“So, you and Dad might go to DC for part of the time?”

“We’ll have to. He has to have a place for when Congress convenes right after New Year’s. It’s a long drive, but flying has extra costs to it as well, including renting a car after we get there. We’re
thinking about trying to find a renter’s agent soon or I’m going to have to scour apartment websites myself.”

“An agent sounds like a good idea since you don’t know the area.”

“That’s what I was thinking.”

The three of them picked their bowls up and sat down at the island to eat.

Sam said, “We’re going to Kentucky for a few days.”

“No one knows I don’t have classes next week. I wanted to have a week off too. I know I’m the fill-in person so people can have vacations, but it’s been a busy semester and I wanted a little time off before it starts all over again.”

“How’s the dual-credit idea working out? Are you going to do it again next semester?”

“I like it,” Kurt said.

“Me too. I like the college instructors more. They don’t have to try to get the students to pay attention and we don’t have to turn in homework every day. It’s more like they share what they know about the topic and they expect us to be interested in the topic enough to do our work without badgering us, or to be adult enough about it to do the work even if we aren’t interested. And yeah, we’re doing it again.”

“It’s kind of weird though. There are two more trimesters for OSU Lima. When you asked how we’d have so many credits, that’s part of it. We’ll start in January and end before spring break, mid-march. And then the last trimester will start after spring break and ends the first week in June. We’ll have class the week after we graduate, and then finals the week after that.”

“That’s not too bad though. Two semesters worth of credits with only adding two weeks to your school year.”

“It’s a great deal financially,” Kurt said. “We’ll have a full year’s worth of credits. I hate to eat and run, but I have to get to the shop.” Kurt grabbed their dishes and put them in the dishwasher.

“We’ll you be home for dinner?”

“I’m taking him out,” Sam said.

“Enjoy yourselves.” She winked at Sam.

Right after lunch, Sam went ahead to campus to pick his pieces up. He didn’t have to wait long to speak with his instructor about them. He went to the comic book shop and looked around for a while. After that, he made one stop at the fabric store on the way home. He put the pottery pieces on one of his shelves in their bedroom when he got back.

Since Kurt was gone, Sam decided that he’d get out all of the things he’d been accumulating and surprise him with them early, giving Kurt a chance to work on them and finish them by Christmas, rather than giving them to him on Christmas and him potentially not having the time to sew after that.

He laid out the satiny blue fabric he had found back a few weeks during one of his visits to the
local second-hand shops, along with the buttons, the black fabric for the back, and the blue thread that matched the fabric that he had picked up that afternoon on the table. He pulled out the white linen shirt and black slacks he had found that he’d been hiding in their closet. Last, but not least, he put the round sunglasses on the table.

He laid out an outfit for each of them to wear out to dinner. He looked around and was pleased with what he had done and went downstairs to wait for Kurt to get home.

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Sam stopped in front of their door before he unlocked it. “Close your eyes.” He unlocked the door and led Kurt over to the table. He stepped back. “Open your eyes. Merry Christmas!”

“Oh, wow. That’s the stuff to make Simon’s outfit. You even got me the glasses.”

“We’ll have to search for a suit jacket that you can alter. I wanted you to be able to have time to enjoy working on it over break and earlier you said, you weren’t sure when you’d have time off – I thought the sooner you had everything, the better.”

Kurt turned and wrapped his arms around Sam and didn’t let go. “It’s perfect. You even got the right kind of buttons.”

“I had help. I showed a photo to the girl at JoAnn Fabric and she showed me the type to get so you could cover them with the fabric.”

“You did a great job. You even found a shirt and pants the right style.”

“You’ll need to take the pants up a little bit and put … darts? … in the back of the shirt so the sleeves are full, but the shirt doesn’t bunch under the vest.”

“Yes, darts. You’ve been paying attention.”

“I’m trying. I want to be able to make stuff too. Or at least understand HOW it’s made so that I can get the right things.”

“I love it. I know they’re not a couple on the show, but that’s okay. We can still cosplay as two people from the same show.”

Kurt squeezed Sam again and leaned in and put his head on Sam’s shoulder. He kissed him just below the ear. “I love all of it. It will be a lot of fun to work on.”

“Are you ready to change so we can go out to eat?”

“Sure. Are you feeling pretty confident about our final tomorrow? I was surprised when you said you wanted to go out tonight instead of study.”

“Honestly, I’m not going to worry about it. I have an A right now. That’s a lot better than I expected. I think I know the material pretty well. But if you’d rather stay in and study, we can. I won’t be mad. We can go out tomorrow evening if you’d rather.”

“Nope. Let’s change. Is where we’re going a surprise?”

“It’s nothing fancy, as you can see from what I laid out, but I heard Tina talking about it and I haven’t tried it yet. You’ve been there with Carole.”

“Hmm.” He headed into the bathroom for a few minutes. He came back out. “I can’t figure it out.”
“Well, get dressed and you’ll see.”

Sam parked in the mall parking lot closest to the food court entrance. When Kurt came around the end of the truck, Sam took his hand.

“The food court?”

“Yep.”

“The Korean place?”

“Bingo.”

“That was a while ago. That’s why it didn’t come to mind. It’s really good.”

“That’s what Carole was saying the other day. She said you really liked it too, and I’ve never had Korean food or American-style Korean food, so it will be fun.”

“Can I pick the next place we go?”

“Sure. This was the only thing on my agenda – eating interesting food with my awesome boyfriend.” He winked at Kurt.

They got in line and ordered. Kurt carried their tray to a booth. They slid in across from each other.

“You can try mine too,” Kurt said. He slid his plate toward Sam to take some before he pulled it toward himself to start eating.

“Tell me about the Hudson-Hummel Christmas situation. I’m figuring last year was tough. You and Finn weren’t getting along great and I don’t even know if you had moved into the new house yet.”

“It was hard, and in the end, they gave up trying to merge the traditions because we were in the middle of moving. Their stuff was mostly in boxes still because their house sold first and they moved everything they were keeping to our house. I wasn’t around when this was going on because I was at Dalton. I didn’t come home on the weekends when I first went there. I had too much work to catch up on. So, when I came back at the end of finals week, it was two days before Christmas Eve. Our house had sold and I spent the first day I was back in Lima packing all of my stuff and moving it to the new house. They had already bought me a new bed since I didn’t have an actual bed, but this folding couch thing. I had to go shopping for bed linens with Carole. Anyway, it was just a lot of commotion and no real time to decorate or anything. But we did talk about it. My dad and I always picked out a live tree a few days before Christmas, but Carole’s allergic. She did all colored lights outside and inside. We always used the white ones on the tree. My dad was never big on gift giving. He’d buy me some snacks and candy for my stocking. A new toothbrush, a couple of small things like a toy I wanted or something utensil for the kitchen or some sewing gadget. But like I said, it was really just a few small things. My mom wasn’t really religious and neither is my dad. The holiday for us was just a few days of family time because my dad would take a few days off. We’d play games, watch Christmas movies, go out and drive around at night the week before Christmas to see the lights. After she died, we still did those same things.”

“Sounds nice and relaxing.”

“It was. Carole, on the other hand, bought Finn a bunch of stuff at Christmas. She has family in
Zanesville, as you know. And some other places. So, they would spend the time going to different family events and exchange gifts and Finn got more presents. So, for him, Christmas is one big present-getting time of year. Huge meals, lots of presents.”

“Not at all similar.”

“Nope. I have no idea what will happen this year. You heard her say that they would be going to DC at some point. That’s all I know about this year. What did your family do?”

“Closer to what you said about what you and your dad did, except add in that we spent a lot of time with our extended family. There was always plenty of food, but it wasn’t about a lot of gifts. We just spent time with people we didn’t get to see that often. None of the adults exchanged gifts. And the kids got presents, but nothing outlandish and looking back on it, I think they talked to each other to work out a plan. That way none of us kids got three hats and no mittens or two boxes of crayons and no coloring books. We mostly got useful stuff and a few toys to entertain ourselves with while the adults talked and stuff.”

“That sounds like a reasonable center ground. I have no idea what to expect. Carole hasn’t started to decorate anything and it’s the end of the first week of December, so maybe she’s decided to go minimalist since they gave Finn a truck for his birthday. Surely, he’s not expecting something expensive for Christmas.”

“I’d hope not. The food is really good. I liked yours too. Mine’s a little more savory, while yours is a little spicier. Where did you want to go after we eat?”

“Just to Walgreens or Wal-Mart if we have to. I’d like to get some white twinkle lights for the bedroom and put them along the bookcase somehow. And I’d like to see what kind of electric or battery-operated candles might be available. We used to have some we’d put in the windows, but they quit working a few years ago. They’re pretty to use year-round.”

“Okay.”

“Do you have any shopping you want or need to do while we’re here?”

“No, but we could swing by Goodwill on the way to get the lights. It will just be a lucky find whenever we find a coat you can turn into a coat like Simon’s.”

“Sure. Lead the way, my good man.” Kurt stood up and grabbed their tray in one hand and Sam’s hand with his other. He dumped the trash and put their tray on the stack.

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“I didn’t get to see the pieces you picked up before we left,” Kurt said as he unlocked their bedroom door. He let Sam walk through, and then he locked it.

“They’re on the shelf near where you’re standing.”

Kurt turned. “Ohh. They turned out really nice. I like them a lot. I think Carole will really like them.”

“I got an A on them, so that was good.”

“It is. Do you want to shower now or put pajamas on to lounge around and shower later or what?”

“We can shower now. If we go to bed pretty early, we can review in the morning. I know you
already did a review last night anyway.”

“Let’s play Magic when we get out. Or do you want to play a different game? Or just snuggle until we fall asleep really early?”

“Let’s put the lights up when we get out and then decide. I’m not sure.”

“Those clips were a good idea,” Sam said. “A little to the left. Yeah, right there. Get down and come look.”

Kurt stepped off the chair and stood next to Sam. “I like them. Do you?”

“I do.”

“Now, what? Magic?”

“Yes.”

Kurt moved the chair back to the table and Sam grabbed their deck boxes. They set their game up. Sam turned the twinkle lights on steady, and he opened the two-pack of flameless pillar candles that they bought and put them on the table by the cards. He turned the lights out.

“Can you still see enough to read the cards?”

“Um, if I move the candle to the edge of the table instead of the center.”

“Okay. Let’s try it.” Sam sat down and moved the second candle to a spot where he could use it to read the cards.

About a half-hour into their game, there was a knock at the door. Kurt got up to answer it. He opened the door back and let Carole in.

“Ooh. Ambient lighting. I like it. You’re playing that card game by candlelight. You two are always up to something interesting.” she said. “At dinner tomorrow night, we’re going to discuss the plans for winter break. Bring your ideas and schedules so we can try to coordinate everyone’s schedules. I’m going to print out a December calendar page to use for planning.”

“Alright. Can I ask you something?”

“You can ask me anything. You know that.”

“Are we combining Christmas traditions or leaning to the Hummel or Hudson side?”

“Last year was a mess. I’ve already talked to Finn. We are not doing the Hudson-style Christmas. We gave Finn a truck. He has enough stuff. We talked about transitioning from being a kid to an adult. He was kind of bummed, but then came around. We’re going to talk about it tomorrow, but we’re thinking of exchanging names for whoever is going to be here. So, if Trish is coming over on Christmas Eve, then her name would go in as well. Each person will have one name and a spending limit of $10-20. That should be high enough to be able to get a movie, CD, book, or something the other person would like.”

“That’s an interesting idea.”

“None of us really needs a bunch of stuff, but it is fun to open a surprise gift. There will be no lists.
People will have to put effort into figuring out what to buy. And no gift cards.”

“Sounds fine to me,” Sam said.

“Finn also mentioned possibly having a New Directions New Year’s Eve party here, but he didn’t know if anyone would want to come because of our no alcohol rule.”

Kurt said, “I don’t know. Mr. Schue made everyone sign a pledge not to drink last year, but I don’t know if anyone followed it.”

“He told me about the TV special too and that you two didn’t want to be in it.”

Sam said, “Yeah. We had creative differences with the director.”

“Artie,” Kurt offered.

“Oh, okay. I have no idea what that means, but that’s fine. He said the show is on Christmas Eve, which could interfere with my idea of exchanging gifts on Christmas Eve and then sleeping in on Christmas morning and having a big brunch. I’ll try to get the details from Finn.”

“Where did you get those flameless pillar candles?”

“Dollar General. They’re rechargeable.”

“I like them. I might have to go see what all they have. I’ll let you two get back to your game. Dinner, 7:00 tomorrow.”

“Got it,” Kurt said. He let her out, and then closed and locked the door.

“So, there’s a little bit of an answer. No big over-the-top Christmas.”

“I’m glad. Drawing names is a good idea.” Kurt sat back in his chair and looked at his cards again so he could get his mind back in the game.

Near the end of second period, Sam came in the room and gave his exam to Mr. Sanchez and sat down at the table at the front of the room. He took his phone out to pass the time until Kurt was finished and handed his exam in.

Mr. Sanchez said, “It’s been a pleasure having you two in class. I believe I will be seeing you next semester in Economics. I hope you enjoy your break.”

“You too,” Sam said. “Thanks for making things work so smoothly. I know nothing about economics, but I’ll be here.”

Kurt said, “I don’t think anyone here knows anything about economics. So, you’ll have an entire class of blank slates.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. As far as I know, the class will have the same people we’ve had this semester, and that’s gone pretty smoothly. There’s a broad range of abilities, but everyone actually tried, which always makes the class more interesting. And everyone’s pretty outgoing, which has made discussions and presentations a lot more fun than when no one talks.”

“This is the first high school class I’ve had at this school like that. All of Dalton’s classes are like that. That was what made being there tolerable until I finally made some friends. Their teachers are
excellent and the students work hard to learn what’s taught.”

“With the hefty cost of a school like that, I’m sure students are quite motivated – by their parents who are footing their tuition bills.”

“Very much so. Plus, they have to get into Ivy League or top schools on the West Coast. So, GPAs and test scores are of the utmost importance. Losing a trust fund is a mighty powerful motivator, in good ways and bad. We’ll see you after break.”

Mr. Sanchez put their tests in his briefcase. The bell rang as Kurt and Sam left.

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Kurt said, “This isn’t the way home.”

“You’re right.”

“Where are we going?”

“Why is it that when you surprise me, I’m supposed to not ask questions and just relax, but when I try to surprise you, you ask a ton of questions?”

Kurt pouted.

“Nice try, gorgeous. Not going to work. Close your eyes.” When they got to where they were going, Sam parked. “Keep your eyes closed.” Sam got out and went around the truck and opened Kurt’s door and took his hand so he could get out without falling. Sam shut his door, and said, “Open them.”

He barely had time to open his eyes when Jeff hug attacked him. “Jeff! I need to be able to breathe still.” Kurt laughed. “It’s good to see you. And you Nick.”

Jeff said, “Come on. Dylan and Sebastian are inside already. Sebastian was whining about it being cold, but don’t tell him I told you that.”

Kurt mimed zipping his lips. “I didn’t even know the movie theater was open in the mornings.”

“I think it must just be over winter break, but it’s only $5 before noon,” Sam said. “We’re watching the new spy movie, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*.”

“Excellent. I saw a few of the trailers. It looked interesting.”

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Kurt asked, “So, after we finish up our Friday family dinner, we’re going to Nick’s or Jeff’s?”

Nick answered, “My house. You won’t need your air mattress. We have one guest room and two of you can sleep in the family room in the basement on our air mattress.”

“Okay. We’ll see you later,” Sam said. He pulled out and drove toward the shop.

“You’ve been a busy bee planning surprises for me.”

“You’re always surprising me. I’ve just managed to pull off a surprise here and there.”

“You didn’t plan anything for Sunday, did you?”
“Nope. Sunday is for snuggles. ALL day. We can pretend like someone picked us up to go somewhere and not answer our door all day.”

“All-day snuggles? Sounds good to me. Did you already pick up the audiobook you wanted?”

“I did. And if all-day snuggles only sound ‘good’, I must be losing my snuggle skills. I’m going to have put a little more effort into it or something.”

“All-day snuggles sound perfect. You are the best snuggler ever. Never, ever doubt your snuggle skills.”

“Now, that’s better.” He reached over to Kurt. “You know there’s a seat belt with a shoulder harness right here next to me. You don’t have to sit on the OTHER side of the seat.”

“Because the OTHER side of the seat is so far away.”

“It is. I can’t kiss you at the red lights when you’re WAY over there.”

While they were sitting at the light, Kurt undid his seat belt, scooted to the center, and fastened the center seat belt. “Better?”

Sam turned and kissed him before the light turned green. “Infinitely better.”

Kurt laughed and put his hand on Sam’s thigh. “I love you.”

“I love you too.” He turned into the shop parking lot. “Go fix some cars, Mr. Mechanic.”

“I’ll do that. What are you going to do? Nope, don’t bother… It’s a surprise.”

“You got it.” He put his hand on the side of Kurt’s face and looked him in the eyes. “You do like the surprises, right? It’s okay to like to surprise someone, but not like to be surprised.”

“I’m learning to like them because of you. I know you don’t like to think about things from my past and I try not to leave them there, but being surprised usually led to things like being locked in port-a-pottys or having liquids of dubious origin thrown at me. But you’re rewiring my brain to make surprises be the good things they should be.” He leaned forward and kissed Sam. “Thank you. Just be patient with me still.”

He nodded and rubbed his thumb along Kurt’s cheek. “I’ll pick you up at 6:00.”

“You don’t have to. Dad’s leaving at 6:00 too. I’ll just ride home with him so you don’t have to interrupt whatever your surprise is, but if part of the surprise includes picking me up, that’s fine too.”

“I’ll text you.”

“Okay. I have to go in or I’ll be late.” He kissed Sam again before he slid across the seat and got out.

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Kurt rode back to the house with Burt when they got off. They both scrubbed their hands an extra time and took their places at the table. Carole had a December calendar printed out like she said. She had obviously eaten while she was cooking because she had no plate in front of her.

“So… who wants to start?” she asked.
Kurt spoke up. “Me?”

“Sure,” she said.

“This is directed at Dad. I need some time off. I checked the schedule after Cassius posted it today. I took a photo of the December schedule before we left. I’ve been scheduled 50 hours a week for the next three weeks. I know that the guys like for me to fill in so that they can have vacations, but between McKinley, OSU, the shop, and homework, I put in like 60 hours a week. I need a vacation too.”

“Let me see that,” Burt said. He looked at the photo. “That’s ridiculous. You weren’t supposed to get scheduled next week at all. You must have mentioned getting an extra week of break or something.”

“I don’t remember saying anything to anyone because I was planning on going with Sam to Kentucky for a few days, but I guess I won’t be going anywhere. With it already marked like that, those guys obviously already have plans that I doubt they can change.”

“Carole and I are going to DC next week. Maybe I said something about you being off school next week. I don’t know. There’s not much I can do. I’m going to be gone and the shop can’t be two people down.”

“It’s not right, Dad. I had plans too. It doesn’t matter what else gets scheduled.” Kurt texted the photo to Carole. “There. Now, you know where I’ll be. I’d like to be excused. I’m not hungry.” Kurt got up and left the table.

Once he was out of earshot, Sam asked, “He really doesn’t ask for much, you know. He pays for everything for himself except meals here at home.” Sam looked at Finn. “Nothing personal against you, Finn.”

Finn shrugged.

“But Finn’s still not paying for all of his own stuff. And he’s working like four hours a week. Kurt will show up like he’s been scheduled. You know he will. But this is wrong. I don’t know how to fix this because he worked hard to have next week free. You can just decide whatever you want and let us know. This isn’t a meeting where anyone else’s input seems valued. I won’t be here part of next week. I don’t have a job. That’s the end of my input anyway. I’m going to go see if I can cheer him up enough to be willing to go to Nick’s like we were planning to.”

Sam left their unused dishes on the table and went upstairs.

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He knocked before opening the door. “It’s me,” he said as he opened it.

“Hey. I’m sorry I can’t go with you like we’d planned.”

Sam closed and locked the door behind him. He noticed that the lights were off, the flameless candles were on in the alcoves on either side of the bed, the twinkle lights were set to twinkle, and there was faint music playing in the background. “I’m not upset with you. C’mere.” He opened his arms to hug Kurt.

Kurt stood up from the end of the bed and stepped into Sam’s embrace. After a couple of minutes, Kurt said, “Can you sit down on the end of the bed?”
“Sure.”

Kurt knelt down in front of him, rose up to his full kneeling height, and pressed himself against the bed. He put his hands on the sides of Sam’s face gently and applied just enough guidance to get Sam to lean forward. Kurt kissed him.

“Samuel Robert Evans, I love you with everything in me. Will you marry me?” He pulled a ring out of his pocket and placed it in his palm and offered it to Sam.

“Yes. Yes!” He leaned forward and kissed Kurt. He put his hand out so that Kurt could put the ring on him. Kurt showed him the ring first. He had order a tungsten carbide burnished dark gray ring. “It has ‘I love you’ engraved on the interior of the band.” He slipped it onto Sam’s finger. “I know it could be years before we can get married here legally. I love you so much.” He rose up on his knees again and Sam leaned forward to kiss him again. “I’m not sure how to word his next part, but I ordered a matching ring for me, but if you’d rather get me a different ring, that’s okay too. I just want both of us to wear a ring.”

“Can I see it?”

“Sure.” Kurt took the matching ring out of his pocket and gave it to Sam.

He took it in the bathroom and looked at the ring Kurt had handed him and he looked at his ring more carefully since that he could see better. He turned the light off and went back into their bedroom. He reached out for Kurt, who stepped closer and held his hand out.

Sam took his hand and said, “I love you more than I thought I could ever love anyone and I want you to be my husband some day.” He slipped Kurt’s ring on. He kissed him and pulled him into a hug.

Kurt put his hand on Sam’s shoulder and held his other hand and started to sway. They slow danced around the room for a few minutes.

“Tell me what made you choose these rings.”

Kurt let go of Sam and took his hand and touched the ring on his finger. “Honestly, they are very affordable and tungsten carbide is the most durable metal. Only diamonds can scratch it. Since I work on cars, I didn’t want to get rings that would get scratched up and need buffed all the time. I liked how masculine these looked even though I ordered the slightly thinner 6mm bands. Neither one of us has really large fingers, so I thought the wider bands would look out of place on us. I liked the burnished band – just a little flair and makes the rings just slightly out of the ordinary. I want you to like it too though, so if it’s not something you’re comfortable with, I can get different rings.”

“I actually really like it. It has a soft edge, not like other rings I’ve seen with more sharp edges.”

“I liked that feature as well. So, you like them?”

“I do. And I love you. And one day we’ll get married.” He wrapped his arms around Kurt and held him tight.

Kurt did the same. Kurt leaned back and kissed him. He ran his hand through Sam’s hair. “I’m going to miss you next week.”

“I’ll miss you too, but I’ll come back home to you. Do your parents know about this?”
“No. The two of us have talked about our future together so many times that I was pretty sure that you would say ‘yes’, but you might have said ‘not yet’ to an engagement or ‘yes’ but you didn’t want to wear a ring at all. I wanted it to be private between us. I wanted it to be completely your choice, no outside pressure.”

“No pressure. All love.” He kissed Kurt.

“Will your parents be upset?”

“I don’t think so. I don’t know of any reason for them to be.”

“I was figuring we could get married after college. If it hasn’t be legalized here yet, we can go to an East Coast state.”

“Seems reasonable.”

“Does the ring fit right?”

“It’s perfect. How did you measure my finger?”

“I have my ways…”


“I know I ask the same question too many times sometimes, but are you sure about me and about the ring? I can keep them and wait if you’re not really ready to say ‘yes’ and wear them.”

“I am absolutely positive about you and I like this ring. It’s not super heavy, it fits well, and it’s not cutting into my hand. And best of all, it means I’m all yours.” Sam kissed him.

“You say the sweetest things. I’m all yours too.” He kissed Sam.

They wrapped their arms back around each other and slow danced while holding each other close.

Sam kissed the side of Kurt’s neck. “I packed our stuff for tonight already. Are you ready to go to Nick’s.”

“Yes. It’s going to be the only time we’re going to get to see Sebastian and Dylan over break unless we go see them on New Year’s Eve. They’re going to Columbus this weekend and staying there all during break. Sebastian won’t be staying here in Lima anymore since his grandfather passed away. They were just staying to get the house on the market. Now that it’s ready to sell, Mark’s taking the few personal things he had brought here from his house and the heirlooms that he wanted to keep back to Columbus this weekend.”

“Is that what Sebastian was telling you in the theater before the movie started?”

“Yeah, the funeral was Friday. Mark packed stuff up this past week while Sebastian had his final exams. Sebastian was going over there after we finished lunch earlier to make sure that there wasn’t anything anywhere in the house that was his that Mark had missed.”

“So, he and his dad are moving back to his dad’s house in Columbus for the rest of the year then?”

“Yeah.”

Sam could hear the sadness in Kurt’s voice. “We’ll still do stuff with them.” Sam let go of Kurt and picked up the duffle he had packed. “Shall we then?” He held his hand out to Kurt.
“Alright. Let me turn everything off.”

Sam moved out into the hallway. Kurt turned all of the lights out and the music off. He took Sam’s hand when he got close enough. Sam ran his finger over Kurt’s ring and smiled. He pulled Kurt’s hand to his lips and kissed his ring.

When they got to the bottom of the stairs, Sam said, “I just need to swing by the kitchen. If you could take this to the truck, please?”

Kurt took the duffle from Sam. He stopped at the coat closet, grabbed his coat, put it on, and went out to the truck.

Sam went into the pantry, picked up some storage containers, and put them in a grocery bag. He went through the kitchen into the dining room. “We’re heading out. We’ll be back some time tomorrow. Just make a copy of what’s going on and Kurt will do his best to do what you want, like always. Just tape it to our door.” He walked out the other end of the dining room, grabbed his coat and put it on before he went out the front door. When he got outside, he saw that Kurt was sitting in the middle of the seat. He opened the passenger door, put the bags in, and went around and got in the driver’s seat.

Kurt wrapped arms around Sam’s neck as soon as he was in the truck. He kissed him. “Thank you for whatever is in that other bag.”

“You don’t even know what it is.”

“It doesn’t matter, well I mean it does. I just know that whatever it is, I’ll like it because it’s the surprise you were working on this afternoon and you did it for me or for us and our friends.”

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Sam backed out into the street. By the time he got to the stop sign at the end of the street, Kurt had started to sing. Sam left his foot on the brake at the stop sign because he wanted to listen to Kurt.

_Every time our eyes meet,_
_This feeling inside me_
_Is almost more than I can take._
_When you touch me,_
_I can see how much you love me._
_And it just blows me away._
_I’ve never been this close to anyone or anything._
_I can hear you thoughts. I can see your dreams._

_I don’t know how you do what you do._
_I’m so in love with you._
_It just keeps getting better._
_I want to spend the rest of my life with you by my side,_
_Forever and ever._
_Every little thing that you do,_
_I’m amazed by you._

_The smell of your skin,_
_The taste of your kiss,_
_The way you whisper in the dark,_
_Your arms all around me,_
You surround me.
Touch every place in my heart.
And it feels like the first time every time.
I want to spend the whole night in your eyes.

I don’t know how you do what you do.
I’m so in love with you.
It just keeps getting better.
I want to spend the rest of my life with you by my side,
Forever and ever.
Every little thing that you do,
I’m amazed by you.

“That was beautiful. Thank you. You had a surprise for me all planned out for tonight, didn’t you?”

“I did. But I still did the most important part of what I had planned. I love you. You better start driving or we’ll never get there,” he teased.

“As you wish…”

“Be careful what you offer. You can’t be quite sure of what I’m wishing for.” Kurt waggled his eyebrows.

“Well, now you’re making me think I should just turn around and take you back home.”

“Tomorrow. Tonight we’re going to have fun with our friends.”

Sam took his foot off the brake, flipped the turn signal on, and headed out to toward the highway to Findlay. “What else did you have planned for tonight?”

“You’ll find out tomorrow unless you have something else planned, in which case you’ll find out Sunday.”

Sam laughed. “Nothing that I know of tomorrow night.”

Kurt put his hand on Sam’s thigh. Sam laid his hand over the top.

“Are we going to say anything or just wait and see who notices? Are you going to tell your parents?”

“I’d like us to tell them together.”

“Alright. You asked me if I thought my parents will be upset. Do you think yours will be?”

“I don’t think so, at least not Carole. I’m pretty sure that she married Christopher when she was pretty young because Finn and I are nearly the same age and she’s several years younger than my dad.”

“I already told you that my parents got married young.”

“I remember.”

“I just thought of something I need to do tomorrow.”

“What’s that?”
“Photograph the new pieces I just brought back and add them to my digital journal and add the photos to the DVD I’ve been keeping the image files on. With them leaving next week, I’m not sure when we’ll be celebrating Carole’s birthday, but I’ll photograph the pieces, and then wrap them. That way they’ll be ready whenever.”

“Shoot. My gift isn’t done. I guess that’s the first thing I’ll work on when we get back tomorrow. When are you going to leave for Kentucky?”

“Well, since you’ve been scheduled to work, maybe I’ll go on Wednesday morning and come back Friday evening?”

“Whatever you think will work. I know we were going to go Thursday and stay over the weekend, but you can decide whatever you think will work best.”

“Well, I still have the swim meet Monday afternoon. I think I’ll leave early Wednesday morning and come back Friday evening. So, unless Carole has the calendar marked with something Sunday morning, maybe we can get up and give her birthday presents to her, and then spend the rest of the day in our room.”

“That should work. We’ll just have to see when we get back tomorrow. Wait. Don’t Stevie and Stacey still have school this week? Isn’t that why we were going to stay for the weekend?”

“You’re right. I guess I’ll go on Friday after lunch so I can be there when they get home from school. We were going to go on Thursday because we were going to do some fun stuff in Cincinnati on Thursday and Friday.”

“You could stay until Monday or Tuesday since they’ll be out of school then.”

“I’ll think about it.”

Kurt put up two fingers and then mimed having boobs.

“Girls!” Jeff yelled.

Kurt nodded. He held up one finger. He cupped his hand to his mouth and pretended to whisper to someone next to him.

Nick yelled, “Gossip Girls!”

“You got it!” Kurt said.

“We need to pick new game,” Sebastian said. “Dylan and I haven’t heard of a lot of these shows. We’re at a disadvantage.”

Sam said, “Okay. You pick the next game.” He put the cards back in the Charades box and put the lid on.

Sebastian said, “Nosy Best Friends.”

Sam stalled. “I don’t know whether you’re teasing or whether that’s actually a French game we’ve never heard of along the lines of ‘Never Have I Ever’.” He handed the box to Nick to put away.

Sebastian laughed. “I hadn’t even thought of that. At first I thought Kurt had just ventured out in the jewelry foray and was trying out rings as his new accessory items to go along with the
brooches and doodads he wears instead of ties, but then I saw that Sam is also wearing a ring, which seems much less like his general fashion style. And the rings match.”

Jeff got up and looked at Kurt’s hand and then Sam’s. “He’s right. I didn’t even notice that they matched. I didn’t even pay attention. So, tell us.”

Sebastian said, “You weren’t wearing them earlier when we went to the movie and to lunch.”

“You’re a regular Sherlock, aren’t you,” Kurt sassed.

“I’m not really a ‘regular’ anything, but go on with your story,” Sebastian sassed back with a smirk on his face and his eyebrow raised.

Sam answered, “Kurt asked me to marry him and I said ‘yes’ after dinner before we came over here.”

“Aww!” Jeff threw his arms around Kurt, and then he hugged Sam. “Congratulations!”

“Thanks,” Kurt said.

“Does anyone know?” Nick asked.

“The four of you,” Sam answered.

“Oh, wow. You haven’t told your parents yet?” Jeff asked.

Kurt said, “Not yet. We can’t get married here anyway. We’re thinking after college.”

Jeff said, “Well, whenever it is, just be sure to invite us.”

Kurt said, “Of course.”

Nick pulled another game off the shelf. “How about Scattergories?”

Sebastian said, “Never heard of it, but if it doesn’t have to do with guessing American TV shows, I’m good. Are there any of those chocolate chip cookies left? Those and brownies are really the only good baked goods Americans have come up with.”

“You’re just a pastry snob, Bas.”

“Yeah, so?”

“There’s more cookies on the end table,” Sam said.

“Excellent.”

Sam laid his head on Kurt’s shoulder and wrapped himself all around Kurt.

Kurt kissed the top of his head. “Thanks for making those chocolate chip cookies. You saved us from listening to Bas berate American cookies again.”

Sam laughed. “He doesn’t really hate American cookies. He’s just a brat and whines so that one of us will make his favorite cookies when we get together just to keep from having to listen to him complain.”
“I know. He’s a brat, but I love him. I love having him here and it’s going to be hard when he goes back after graduation.”

“Maybe he’ll stay for a few weeks if we ask him and we could all do something fun before he and Dylan go back.”

“We can ask. We’re definitely doing something fun for spring break. I am not working all of spring break like I did last year and like I’m doing over winter break.”

“Your dad has to get a place in DC. We should be able to go there and stay.”

“Good point. Much less expensive than someplace where we’d have to get a hotel. That can be your job while I work all day EVERY day this week. I’ll have something to look forward to doing with you every night – seeing the ideas you come up with.”

Sam tipped his head up. “Kiss me?”

“Always.” His lips met Sam’s not quite aligned because of the total darkness in the basement. Kurt giggled and found Sam’s lips and kissed him again and again and again. “I love you and I love kissing you.”

“I love you too.” He started kissing him again. “And I love kissing you too.”

Kurt giggled because Sam was kissing him up his neck and tickling him by occasionally licking him lightly.

“Okay, I will agree on this one point,” Sebastian said. “Cinnamon apple raisin nut bread is also an acceptable baked good. So, three points to the American bakers.”

“You’re welcome,” Sam said.

Jeff said, “It really is good. I like the banana nut bread too. I might need another piece of each to decide for sure which one I like better.”

Kurt rolled his eyes and sliced one more piece of each, and then put them on Jeff’s awaiting plate.

He took a bite of the banana bread. “So good.”

Once they finished eating breakfast, they divided up, showered and dressed. Kurt and Sam were the last to come downstairs.

“Close your eyes,” Kurt called out.

The other four did as they were asked. Kurt and Sam approached each of them and laid something in their hands or on their laps.

Sam said, “Okay. Open them.”

Each one was holding a different deep jewel-toned hoodie that had ‘221B’ painted on them.

“These are awesome!” Jeff said. He took off his Dalton hoodie and put his on. “Nice. Thanks.”

The other three put theirs on as well. Everyone thanked them.
“You’re lucky I was planning ahead and had already painted them when you decided to have a sleepover and watch season one together. I was going to give them to you on New Year’s Eve and watch all of the episodes then since the new season starts in January.”

“Well, these are great,” Sebastian said. “Let’s start the first one. It needs to be darker though.”

Nick got up and shut all of the curtains. “Better?”

“Much. Thanks.”

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Four and a half hours later, they had watched all three episodes and everyone was ready to get up and move around.

“So, what’s next on the agenda?” Kurt asked.

“Lunch,” Dylan answered. “I’m the one who picked the place for lunch.”

He and Sebastian grabbed their Dalton hoodies and went upstairs to put them in their bags. They came back down a few minutes later. Kurt and Sam’s bag was already downstairs. Sam went into the kitchen to collect up the containers and leftover bread. They all put their coats on and they followed Nick to the restaurant.

They waited for a table and Kurt thought of meeting Dave and Santana. They were shown to a large table fairly quickly since they had arrived after the lunch rush had ended.

“I wanted to come here after Nick described it. It sounded like fun. I’m not all that knowledgeable about American cuisine. The food the cafeteria at Dalton is good, but this seemed more like an adventure.”

Sam smiled. “The food here is good. I’m having the meatloaf.”

“Chicken pot pie for me,” Kurt said. “It’s a holiday.”

After noticing that the two menus he had been handed were actually different, Dylan said, “Ooh, you can order breakfast all day. That’s fun, but I’ve had American breakfast food, well not some of this stuff though. I’m ordering some of this à la carte because I just want to try it.”

The server came and took their orders and brought their drinks back.

“I’m going to buy some of that candy I saw too,” Dylan said. “This is like one of those places in Disney I’ve seen pictures of.”

Nick said, “You’re right. It sort of is. They have lots of fun stuff in the gift shop.”

It didn’t take too long for the server to bring their food out. Once she had given everyone their meals and Dylan the extra stuff he ordered, she asked if they needed anything else. When they said they didn’t, she asked, “Sherlock Holmes Club?”

Kurt laughed and nodded. “Something like that, yeah.”

“Cool. I can’t wait for the next season. Another few weeks. I’m so excited.”

Sam said, “So are we. We just rewatched the whole first season this morning.”
“Awesome. Enjoy your food.”

Sam said, “Those grits will need salt. Don’t try them without it. The gravy might need some too.”

Dylan nodded and reached for the salt shaker. He took a bite after adding some and added a bit more. “They’re interesting.” He tried the biscuits and gravy next. “Oh, now I like that a lot.”

“Before anyone takes a bite, do you want to try anything any of us ordered? We can put a small bite on that biscuit plate.”

“Umm. Sure. Just a tiny bite.”

They passed the biscuit plate around and each of them put a bite of their entrée on it. He ate each bite. “I think maybe I just like American food more than I thought I would. I like all of it, even the grits despite the unusual texture. I’m glad I picked this place. It’s fun.”

Everyone ate and enjoyed what they ordered. When they finished, they browsed through the gift shop. Dylan ended up with a bunch of candy.

“Stop looking at me like that. It’s not all for me. My mum’s coming tomorrow and Christmas is soon. She and my dad both love sweets. I can wrap all of these up together for them to share and they will love it.”

“That’s actually a really good idea. Finn has a huge sweet tooth. I’ll be right back.” Kurt came back with five packages of candy. “Done.”

When they got outside, they said their goodbyes. Nick and Jeff had parked on the opposite side of the lot from them. They waved as they got in Nick’s car.

“Kurt, can I talk to you?” Sebastian asked. He led Kurt down the sidewalk a bit.

They came back a few minutes later.

An hour later, Sam pulled into the driveway. Sebastian pulled up next to him. Sebastian, Dylan, and Kurt carried the boxes from the back of Sam’s truck upstairs and set them in the hallway. Dylan went back downstairs.

“Happy Christmas,” he called from the first landing.

Kurt said, “To you too.”

Kurt pulled Sebastian into a hug. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. You can come stay with me and my dad in Columbus any time. I’m going to miss being here even though I thought I would hate it.”

“We’ll do what we can. Hopefully, we won’t get a lot of nasty weather on the weekends and we can drive down to see you. We can go to one of the clubs since we won’t have to drive back the same night.”

“Sounds good. Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas.”
Sebastian went back downstairs. Kurt wiped his eyes and unlocked their bedroom door and took the stuff inside. A few minutes later Sam came upstairs with their duffle.

“What is all this stuff?”

“You know that Sebastian’s grandfather died.”

Sam nodded.

“Well, it turns out that he was quite the fashionable man back in his day and he and I are the same size, according to Sebastian. So, this wardrobe box has suits in it. That taller wardrobe box has coats in it. That box has the foldable clothing, like sweaters I guess. And that box has shoes in it. Mark told Sebastian to let me have all of it and to just donate anything that didn’t fit or I didn’t want. He and Sebastian are both too tall to wear the clothes since they’re all tailored to fit someone shorter. And they wear one size bigger shoes.”

“So, you’ve won the lottery of vintage clothes?”

“I have.” He walked back over to the door and took the taped calendar down. He closed the door and locked it. “Shall we look at this first?”

“I suppose.”

They marked the December calendar on their wall with the events from the calendar Carole had left for them.

“I’ve double-checked and I don’t see anything that says ‘Carole’s birthday’.”

“That’s because she’s the one who did it,” Kurt said. “She won’t have planned something for herself.” Kurt picked up his phone and called Finn.

“Yeah, Kurt?”

“I need to know if you’re going to be home tomorrow morning.”

“Yeah.”

“Okay. Do you have your mom’s birthday gift yet?”

“No…”

“Do that before you come home. We’re going to have a surprise birthday breakfast for her tomorrow.”

“Any idea what to get her?”

“She’s your mom.”

“You’re a better shopper.”

“Fine. I’ll text you what to buy her. Get exactly what I send. Ask for help, if you need to.”
“Alright. I can do that.”

Kurt looked up the curtain rod that he had seen Carole looking at when they were at Wal-Mart.

“Well, that’s solved. I need to get sewing though. Let’s open the hanging clothes boxes and make sure that nothing fell off the hangers. Actually you can do that while I set up the sewing machine and the ironing board. I’ll look through them after I finish the valance.”

“Oh, and the photos. Actually do that first before you lose all of the natural light.”

“Good call. I almost forgot. The boxes of clothes pushed the photos right out of my mind.”

Two hours later, Kurt had finished the valance. He ironed it and hung it over a hanger to keep it wrinkle free. Sam had been sketching while he was sewing.

“Done. I’m going to look in the boxes now. You can keep drawing, if you want.” He opened he box of coats first and took them out and laid them on the bed.

“Is that what I think it is?”

“If you think it’s a black nearly knee length dress coat, then you’re right.” Kurt picked it up first and tried it on. “It fits.”

“It’s really, really similar to the one that Simon wears.”

“I’m not altering it. I’m wearing it just like it is.”

“It looks great.”

Kurt went and looked at himself in the mirror on his dresser. “It does.” He took it off, put it on the hanger, and put it back in the box on the bar. He tried on the rest of the coats. As he hung the last one back in the box, he said, “They all fit. How will I choose which ones to keep when I like all of them?”

“Maybe that’s a task for another day.”

“Maybe. Let’s see what’s in the box. Maybe I can sort through it quickly.” Kurt opened it to find button-up long-sleeved shirts, cardigans, and pajama sets. “I can’t sort through this quickly either. I know we don’t even wear pajamas, but look at them.”

“We can share them. We can get rid of my beat up ones and we can keep the matching sets for when we have guests at some point in our future. We’ll want pajamas then.”

“Let’s just push the boxes in the corner for now. It’s almost time for dinner. And I have plans for after dinner.”

“Mmm. The plans you had made for last night?”

“Those are the ones.”

Instead of helping Kurt push the boxes, Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt from behind and kissed the back of his neck. “I’ve been looking forward to finding out what THOSE plans are since last
night.”

“Then help me move these boxes out of the way. I’ll push, you keep it from tipping over.”

Once they had them out of the way, Kurt started putting away the sewing machine and the stuff he had gotten out to work on Carole’s present. “Can you get our laundry together? If we do the wash-and-dries now, we can do the hang-to-dry load while we eat. That way we can hang them after we eat and then come up here and stay.”

“You’re so good with the plans. My mind is not focused on anything other than the mystery of your plans for after dinner.” He waggled his eyebrows. He sorted their clothes and took the first load down.

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“So, Mr. Marvelous planner, do you have a plan for how we’re going to tell your parents?”

“While you were downstairs, I called Finn again. He’s not coming home for dinner, so we can tell them before we eat. Otherwise, Carole is sure to notice the rings while we’re eating.”

“How about I follow your lead since they’re your parents.”

“Fair enough.” Kurt put the ironing board back in his closet. He tested the iron to see if he could put it away. He wrapped the cord up and put it away too. “I can’t wait to get started on the vest. The fabric you got is perfect.”

“That’s what I thought when I saw it.”

“Oh, I got something else when I ordered the rings. They’re actually for the rings.” He opened his top dresser drawer and pulled out a small envelope. “Let me have your keyring.”

Sam pulled his keys out and gave them to Kurt. He fastened the swiveling, snap-hook clip to Sam’s keychain. “This way if you need to take your ring off for some reason, you have a way to keep it from getting lost.” He showed how the clasp wouldn’t open just by being bumped. “With the rings being tungsten, being in your pocket with your keys shouldn’t scratch it up at all.”

He took his keychain back from Kurt and played with the clasp to see how it opened. “I will have to take it off for the swim meets. We’re not allowed to wear anything besides swim caps and our racing suits, so that ring holder will be perfect.”

He took his own keychain out and fastened the second hook onto it. “There may be times that I have to take mine off to be able to fit my hand somewhere inside a car engine too. I was planning to come to your meet on Monday, but I won’t be able to now.” He put the small envelope in his box of envelopes in the cabinet with all of his craft stuff in it.

“I know. It’s not your fault though.”

“But I was looking forward to it.” Kurt grabbed the laundry on the bed and tossed it into the basket. “Alright. Let’s go down.”

Sam put his hands on Kurt’s hips and started humming the conga song and kicking his legs, causing Kurt to laugh. He moved his hands to Kurt’s shoulders on the way down the stairs, and then back to his hips once they were down. He did it all the way into the laundry room. When Kurt stopped, he turned around and kissed Sam.
“You are so much fun.”

He hung the hangers he had brought with him up on the rack, and then he started pulling stuff out of the washer and put it on top. Sam grabbed the items and tossed them into the dryer. Kurt reloaded the washer and started it. Sam started the dryer.

“Done.” Kurt turned to leave the room.

Sam moved up behind him quickly and reattached his hands to Kurt’s hips. “Doo doo doo doo doo doo.” And he kicked.

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Kurt started to sing.

_Come on shake your body. Do the conga._
You know you can’t control yourself any longer
Feel the rhythm of the music getting stronger
Don’t you fight it ‘til you try to do that conga beat.

Everybody, gather round now.
Let your body feel the heat.
Don’t you worry if you can’t dance,
Let the music move your feet.

_Come on shake your body. Do the conga._
You know you can’t control yourself any longer
Feel the rhythm of the music getting stronger
Don’t you fight it ‘til you try to do that conga beat.

Carole was in the kitchen and started laughing until Kurt put his hand on her shoulders and started pushing her around the kitchen as the head of the conga line. Burt came in from the living room and shook his head and smiled.

“Come on, Dad. You’re missing the conga.”

“I’ll pass. I’ll just make everyone trip and fall.”

Kurt stopped singing and grabbed the plates. Sam grabbed the silverware and they set the table and sat down, leaving Carole and Burt to bring the food in. Once everything was on the table, Kurt put his hand on Sam’s leg.

“We have something to tell you,” Kurt said.


“Last night, I asked Sam to marry me.”


Carole shushed him. “Burt, you heard him just fine.” She turned to Kurt and Sam. “And?”

“And I said ‘yes’ of course,” Sam said with a huge smile on his face.

“You’re in high school,” Burt said.
“I know. We also can’t get married in Ohio yet anyway. We were thinking that if it’s still not legal by the time we graduate from college, we’ll go somewhere on the East Coast where it’s legal for us to get married.”

“Sam, honey. Did he give you a ring?”

“He did.” Sam put his hand on the table.

Kurt put his hand on top of Sam’s so both of the rings were showing.

“Those are nice looking rings. Sturdy, but not bulky.”

“Thank you,” Kurt said. “Dad?”

“Yeah, Kurt. I’m fine. You just took my by surprise is all. But I’m fine. You two work hard and anyone with eyes can see that the two you are good together. There’s been more laughter in this house in the last … what? … 8 months than there had been in the previous 8 years.”

Kurt smiled. “So you’re not upset?”

“Not at all. Just surprised. You’re both 18 and you are old enough to drive, vote, and get married – at least some places. Have you told your parents yet?”

“Not yet. I’m going to tell them when I go visit this coming week.”

Carole picked up the serving spoon and put some of the casserole on her plate. She scooped more up. Sam offered her his plate and dinner finally started. They passed her their plates and once they all had food on their plates, everyone started to eat.

Kurt took a deep breath and relaxed. He told Burt about Mark and Sebastian living in Columbus again.

“Are those new hoodies?” Carole asked. “Where do I get one? And I would like to borrow your DVDs, if that’s okay. The new season is in a few weeks.”

“Sure,” Sam said. “I’ll bring the DVDs down after we finish eating. And to get a hoodie, all you have to do is buy one you like and I’ll do it for you. I’ve made 6 so far.”

“I’ll do that at some point.”

About the time they finished eating, the front door opened and Finn and Trish came in.

“We’re in the dining room,” Carole called out.

They stepped inside the far end of the room and waved. Finn took Trish’s coat and hung it up. She came into the room and sat next to Sam.

“What’s on your hoodies?”

They turned so she could see.

“I need one. Why didn’t I get invited to the Sherlock Club?”

“You can join. You have to bring your own hoodie though. I’ll add the lettering.”

“You did them?”
“I did. Nick, Jeff, Sebastian, and Dylan have one too.”

“Well, now I really feel left out. I’ll bring a hoodie over. It’s not like I have 10 of them in my closet or anything.”

Sam laughed.

“You have matching rings,” she said. “Are you two engaged?”

They nodded.

She squealed. “Sorry. I’ll be more calm. That’s awesome. When’s the wedding?”

“Not for a while. We can’t even get married legally in Ohio.”

“Right. Well, if I ever get to vote on the issue, I will vote for marriage equality.”

“Thanks,” Kurt said.

“Where did Finn go?” Carole asked.

“He had to put something away,” he said. “He’ll be back down.”

Just a couple of minutes later, he came traipsing through the kitchen and into the dining room.

“If you look in the pantry on the top shelf on the right, I left four chocolate chip cookies. You can share them with Trish.”

“Cool.” He turned around and retrieved the cookies. He sat at the end of the table and put the container between him and Trish.

She took one out. “These rock. Which one of you made them?”

“Me,” Sam said. “I used Kurt’s recipe.”

“Good job.”

“Thanks.” Sam looked at Kurt and he nodded his head.

“Kurt and I are engaged.”

“Really?”


“I said ‘yes’.”

“Congratulations!”

“Thanks,” Kurt and Sam said at the same time.

“Are you ready to watch the movie?” Finn asked Trish.

“Sure.”

“See ya,” Finn said.
The two of them headed downstairs.

Kurt and Sam finished and cleared their places. “Thanks for dinner. It was delicious,” Kurt said to Carole.

“You’re welcome.”

Sam went upstairs to grab the Sherlock DVDs while Kurt worked on the laundry. Sam came into the laundry room and helped Kurt finish up, but Kurt shook his head when Sam tried to take some of it up.

“We’ll grab all of it in the morning.”

When they got upstairs, Kurt turned the twinkle lights, the nightlights, and the flameless candles on. He started a playlist on his iPod, and started undressing Sam, who reciprocated. He tossed their clothes in the closet on the floor where they laundry basket normally was. He had brought up the small electric heater Burt kept in the garage for winter projects up and put it under the bed in preparation. He pulled it out and turned it on. He folded the comforter up and put it on their table. He put a blanket Sam hadn’t seen before on the bed. Once he had finished all of that, he took Sam hand and led him to the bathroom.

Kurt took his time and lovingly bathed Sam. Throughout the whole process, he reminded Sam of many small things that Sam had done that he appreciated. He interspersed everything he did and said with kisses. Kurt let Sam bathe him as well because he wanted to.

When they got out, Kurt brushed his teeth quickly and left Sam in the bathroom to shave and brush his teeth. While he was still in the bathroom, Kurt pulled out the bottle of massage oil that he had ordered when he ordered their rings. He put it under his pillow, along with the old hand towel he had grabbed, and slid both pillows up and turned them upright, leaving a space in the center for Sam to lie down.

Sam came out of the bathroom to find Kurt waiting for him on the bed.

“Lie down on your stomach in the middle. I’m going to give you a massage. You won’t need the boxer briefs.”

Sam went around the bed and put the underwear on the dresser and lay down in the center of the bed like Kurt had asked. Kurt pulled the oil out and put some on his hands. He straddled Sam and started at his feet and worked his way up. He worked out the small knots he found in Sam’s back and shoulders.

Kurt leaned down and kissed Sam’s cheek. “I love you so much.”

“I love you too. This feels so good. Whatever you’re rubbing on me feels great and I smell like I’m ready to bake.”

Kurt laughed. “I thought we’d both enjoy the vanilla more than lilac or some flowery smell.”

“Umm hmm. I smell tasty. It’s a relaxing smell.”

“Turn over so I can do your front.” Kurt moved to his hands and knees so that Sam could flip over. Once he did, Kurt kissed his forehead, then his eyelids, and then moved to his lips. Between kisses, Kurt said, “I want to kiss you every day for the rest of my life.”
“Sounds perfect.” Sam wrapped his hands around Kurt and tried to pull him down on top of him.

Kurt kissed him gently, but didn’t let himself be pulled down. He sat back up and put a little bit more of the oil on his hands and began to massage his chest.

Sam pushed up to sitting. “Wrap your legs around me.” He repositioned himself and reached for the oil and put a small bit on his hands and began to rub it on Kurt’s chest as well. “Can I put this…?”

“Yes, please.”

Kurt used the hand towel to clean them up and dropped it on the floor. He gently pushed Sam backwards and pulled him on his side facing him and he scooted as close as he could get by wrapping his leg over Sam’s and sliding his right arm under Sam’s pillow. They lay together their breathing still rapid, but slowing. They traded gentle kisses back and forth for quite a while. Kurt ran his hand through Sam’s still damp hair. “I love you. I’m looking forward to spending every day of the rest of my life telling you and showing you that.” He moved his hand to the side of Sam’s face and pressed in to kiss him passionately.

Sam pulled back just enough to say, “I love you too” before he returned to the kissing. He managed to rotate onto his back and get Kurt to lie on top of him.

After a second quick shower, they took the extra blanket off the bed and put the comforter back on. Kurt turned the small heater off and climbed under the covers and snuggled up to Sam. He did his version of the octopus snuggle and wiggled until he got comfortable, but he also hammed it up a bit and managed to “accidentally” tickle Sam quite a few times, causing him to laugh and retaliate. Eventually they stopped tickling each other and just lay completely entangled in each other’s arms.

“Awesome plans,” Sam said sweetly. He ran his hand through Kurt’s hair. “I get to use that oil on you sometime too, right?”

“Of course.”
Kurt let his alarm go off until it stopped because he did not want to move at all. He was super comfortable and toasty warm. Sam started to kiss the back of his neck.

“Mmm. Morning, sweetie.”

“Morning, gorgeous. I’m cozy and I don’t want to move.”

“Me either. We’re going to snuggle a lot today, right? I need motivation to go through with my plan.”

“Yes. We’re going to snuggle, maybe even naked snuggles.”

“Mmm. I’m excited and bummed to watch the last Warehouse 13 episode. The new season won’t start again until next summer.”

“I know. We’ll have to try something new between now and then.”

“M’kay. I don’t want to move, but I want to kiss you.”

Sam moved his hand just enough to run his fingers over Kurt’s ring. “I’m not dreaming then.”

“Nope. No dream. Me and you.”

Sam started to sing.

Me and you, you and me.
No matter how they toss the dice, it had to be.
The only one for me is you, and you for me.
So happy together.

I can’t see me lovin’ nobody but you
For all my life.
When you’re with me, baby the skies’ll be blue,
For all my life.

He hummed the first part again and ran his fingers over Kurt’s ring.

So happy together.

“That’s true. I’m definitely happy with you. You make me laugh and smile.”

“You should always laugh and smile. I love you.” He kissed the back of his neck again.

“I love you too. The kissing side is winning.” Kurt wiggled and turned over to face Sam and kissed him. Kurt’s alarm went off a second time. “We have to get up this time or she might get up before we finish. Put some pajamas on and let’s go downstairs.”

Sam put some pajama pants on. Kurt looked at him and smirked. “Baggy t-shirts for both of us.”

“I have a better idea.” He grabbed Kurt’s hand and pulled into the bathroom.
Fifteen minutes later, Kurt, Sam, Finn, and Trish were in the kitchen making breakfast as quietly as possible. Once they had it done, they sent Finn to go get Carole, feigning needing help in the kitchen with something. She came out and he stepped to the side and let her step into the kitchen first. The other three popped up from behind the island and Finn joined them in saying, “Surprise!”

“What’s going on?” she asked.

“It’s a surprise birthday breakfast,” Finn said.

Kurt added. “You’re going to be gone on your birthday, so we’re celebrating this morning. I’ll go get Dad. The food is already on the table.” Kurt went and got Burt to come eat.

“Well, look at that,” Burt said. “It looks great.” He picked up a platter and held it for Carole to take what she wanted, and then he took some for himself and passed it around.

Sam said, “Since it’s a breakfast party, we made you blueberry muffins instead of a cake or cupcakes.”

“Blueberry muffins are my favorite.”

Trish said, “That’s what Kurt said.”

Kurt winked at Carole.

When they finished eating, the teens cleared the dishes and platters and came back with her gifts. They made her close her eyes and they put her gifts on the table, except Finn put his on the floor next to his chair because there was no way to hide what it was.

“Open them,” Finn said.

“You all didn’t need to get me presents.”

“Well, we did anyway.”

She opened the first one, which was from Trish. It was a Washington, DC visitor’s guidebook. “That’s really nice. That will be fun to look at on the way there this evening.”

“It has a nice map in it.”

“Perfect. I like my phone map well enough, but I’m just old enough that a map in my hand feels more safe. I won’t lose it if my phone dies. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

She moved on to opening Sam’s gift. “Wow, this is heavy.” She opened the box top and took out the first item wrapped in tissue paper. She unwrapped it. “Oh, Sam. It’s perfect. You made this, didn’t you?”

He nodded.

She moved on to the second piece. “They match. They’re perfect. I’ve been looking for a new kitchen gadget holder for ages. You listened to what I described and made the very thing and a matching double spoon rest.” The base of the gadget holder was wider than the top, keeping the utensils from flopping every which way. It was shades of blue to match the tile behind the stove.
“They can go in the dishwasher, but it’s probably better to just wash them by hand.”

“That’s easy enough. Thank you.”

The last present laying on the table was Kurt’s. She pulled out the valance. “Kurt, it’s exactly what I wanted for the kitchen window. Thank you.”

Finn leaned down to pick his up and slid it onto the table.

“Exactly what I need,” she laughed. “Now, I can hang it up and not be blinded when I stand and wash dishes when the sun is shining in. One of the trees out back blocks the sun a lot of the time, but when it gets above the tree line it’s blinding. Come on. Let’s put it up and I’m going to put the utensils in my new pottery piece.”

The teens brought the items in.

“I’ll go get a screwdriver for the tension rod,” Burt said.

He came back a few minutes later and helped Finn adjust it to the right length. Kurt slipped the valance on and Burt put it up.

“Perfect. I love it.” She took a damp rag and wiped the pottery pieces down and then dried them off with a paper towel. She removed the utensils from the container they were in, which was too short and wide, and allowed everything to practically fall out all the time.

“These are silicone feet on the spoon rest. It won’t scratch the your glass stovetop.”

“You thought of everything. It looks great. The blues are perfect. It looks so much more fun in here now. A little splash of color. Thank you.” She offered each of the teens hugs. “You all are sneaky. I think you’ve all been taking lessons from Kurt.”

He put on his most outraged, yet innocent look. “Who me?”

“You’ve been caught, you sneaky sweetheart.” She winked at him.

“We know you two are leaving soon. Have a good trip. I think all of us are going back to bed,” Kurt said.

“I am for sure,” Finn said. “Sunday morning doesn’t start for another two hours at least.”

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Burt and Carole called them down when they were getting ready to leave a couple of hours later. But said, “Be sure to follow the security protocols. I don’t want calls from the security company that the house alarm has gone off because you didn’t put the codes in and whatnot.”

“We’ll remember, Dad.”

Sam said, “Have a good time. I hope you find a place you like.”

“We’ll see you Sunday,” Finn said.

Carole hugged each of them again. “No craziness. You four only when we’re gone. Well Puck too, but only him. And Kurt’s Warbler friends. They never cause trouble.”
Kurt laughed. “We won’t burn the house down, or host any orgies or drinking parties. Now go on. We’re all adults. Go have fun.”

She play smacked him. “Orgies and drinking parties – the things of parents’ nightmares.” She shook her head and laughed.

As soon as she closed the door, Kurt reset the alarm. “We’ll be in our room all day, relaxing. I know you two have finals to study for.”

Kurt set the laptop up to watch the *Warehouse 13* episode. Sam turned the space heater on and helped Kurt out of his pajamas and then took his own off. They piled the pillows up and got comfortable. Kurt scooted back and Sam sat between his legs and moved the breakfast tray so they could both see and pressed play.

When it finished, Kurt said, “Well, that wasn’t nearly as good as some of the other episodes, but it was alright.”

“I agree, but I did get something new for us to watch. Nick loaned them to us.”

“What is it?”

“*Castle*. Nathan Fillion is the male lead. It’s not sci-fi though. He’s an author who helps the police. The lead female is a detective in New York City.”

“Okay. Why not? If Nick and Jeff like it, we might like it too. Put the first disc in and let’s see. Let’s switch. This time you can hold me.”

They rearranged and Kurt started the DVD. As soon as the first episode ended, he started the second one. When it ended, Kurt just left it at the menu.

“So what do you think?” Kurt asked.

“It’s kind of gruesomely awesome. I love the banter and how much she hates having him be good at it.”

“Me too. Well, now we have a new series to watch.”

Kurt got up to put the laptop on the table. There was a knock at their door. They both slipped their pajamas on. Kurt answered the door.

Trish said, “I’m sorry to bother you two, but is there any chance I can put that *Firefly* outfit on, and then you take my picture? My dad is on the fence about it. I’ve offered to wear a suitably feminine outfit for at least one of the poses so he can send it to whoever doesn’t approve of my style. But he won’t say ‘yes’ unless he sees it on me. I tried to show him the picture of Nathan Fillion wearing the outfit and it didn’t fly.”

Sam got the outfit out of the closet, handed it to her, and went back for the boots. You can change in the bathroom if you want. Or we can just sit at the table with our backs to you and you can change in here.”

“Sure. Not that either one of you have any interest in seeing me with my clothes off anyway.” She laid the outfit on the bed.
They sat down and waited. Once she was dressed, they got up. Kurt opened the curtains and the sheers to let as much light in as possible.

“Well, it fits,” she said. “Even the boots. Can you take my picture with my phone? All four sides. I’ll stand here in front of the door.”

Kurt took her phone and took the photos. She looked at them and put her phone back down on the bed. They turned around and she changed back into what looked like Finn’s pajama pants and one her own hoodies.

“Done.” She hung everything back up. “Thanks.”

“No problem,” Kurt said. “Tell Finn that I said that you look cuter in those pajama pants than he does.”

She laughed. “He needs some new ones. These are just long enough for me.”

“I’ll tell Carole. She wanted me to help him with his clothing. So, if you have any other suggestions let me know. Look on Kohl’s. I’m her super secret personal shopper and I’ll be ordering soon.”

“I’ll do that. Didn’t you just spill the secret to Sam?”

“Sam knows all of my secrets already.” He winked at Sam. “He made a list. Santa’s chosen to buy us things we need this year. His list has some paintbrushes and a pencil set he needs for his drawing class next semester.”

“I see. Well, I know he has socks with holes in them in his dresser because I saw them when I was looking for the pajama pants last night.”

“Longer pajama pants and socks. Santa can do that.”

“We ordered Chinese for lunch. Finn said he got what you two like. It should be here in like 10 minutes.”

Sam asked, “Have you seen Castle?”

“My dad loves that show. We usually watch it together. Why?”

“Oh, Nick loaned me the DVDs. You and Finn can watch them over break if you want.”

“Thanks. I’ll ask him.”

“We also have the first season of Sherlock.”

“That’s a definite yes.”

Sam grabbed the case off their shelf and handed it to her. “You can look at the rest of what we have. I think Finn mostly has action movies.”

She looked on the shelf. “I see several I like. We’ll watch these first though, thanks.”

They heard the doorbell, and then Finn clomping down the stairs to answer the door.

“Why did he order Chinese to be delivered?”
"He said he wanted to do something nice for all of us. Seemed like a good enough answer to me."

They all went downstairs. Kurt reset the alarm since Finn’s hands were full. He carried the sacks into the dining room. Sam grabbed silverware and they sat down to eat.

"Thanks, Finn," Sam said. "This is a nice surprise."

"It’s not a bribe or anything, but I figure I’d better start working on the putting good into the world before karma comes after me for the jackass I used to be."

Kurt laughed. "That’s a good idea, Finn."

"And since a good portion of the jackass things I did involved you, I figured the quickest way back into good graces is to start doing a lot of nice things for you instead."

Kurt smiled. "Well, I appreciate your efforts. This is really good."

Trish said, "He told me what he used to do. I was really shocked. I can’t imagine him being like that."

"I can’t imagine myself doing those things now either, but I was convinced that being top dog was the most important thing. Peer pressure is stupid."

"At least you learned. I told him that I wouldn’t have agreed to be his girlfriend if he still acted like that."

"He’s figured a lot of stuff out in the last 9 months. It took a couple of knocks upside the head though."

"That’s true. But I gave up being a totally awful person over two years ago. I just had a lot of other things to work out. I’m getting there."

"That you are," Kurt agreed. "I’m sure you never imagined hanging out with me, my boyfriend and our four gay friends AND having a good time."

"Definitely not. I was stupid and thought all gay guys were prissy and annoying like you were."

Kurt stuck his tongue out. "Annoying, I’ll grant you. But I am not prissy. I’m detail-oriented and somewhat of an overplanner."

Finn laughed and took his phone out. "All that means is that you’re using other words to try to prove that you aren’t prissy, which according to Thesaurus dot com means: particular and fussy. The list of synonyms include finicky, goody-two-shoes, overnice, persnickety, and prim and proper, all of which fit you pretty well."

"Ooh, burn," Sam said. "Finn’s learned to use a thesaurus against you."

Kurt rolled his eyes and took his own phone out. "I will grant you that many of those things describe me, BUT the connotation of the word ‘prissy’ implies that all of those things are feminine. See where it lists ‘sissy’ and ‘sissified’? Prissy is most often used to describe very feminine behavior that fits those descriptions that you listed. I am not a girl. Nothing against girls, but I do not care for having misogynistic words used to describe me or girls for that matter."

"Mis-go-no- what?"

Kurt texted him the correct spelling.
He used his phone again. “I don’t hate women. Not at all.”

“Fine. You don’t hate women. What would you call Puck if he did the things I do that you consider prissy?”

“Obnoxious? Uptight? I’d tell him to take a chill pill. That’s it. You were the opposite of chill.”

Kurt laughed. “I’d rather you call me any of those things than prissy.”

“Got it.”

“Of course, if you had told me to take a chill pill I would have just mouthed off to you even more.”

“I know.”

Kurt looked at Trish. “That was my method of defending myself against guys who were much bigger than I was. I was still like 5’6” when I started 10th grade. So, you can imagine how the jocks towered over me.”

“Yeah. He’s lucky we didn’t go to the same school. I would have probably popped him for bothering you. I’ve been nearly this tall since I was 14. And you’re really funny and interestingly unusual, so I’m sure we would have been friends.”

“Well, no need to deck me now,” Finn said. “And he’s a lot more chill than he used to be.”

“Not being harassed does a lot to help me be chill. And after you stopped being a jackass, I didn’t have so many smartass things to say to you.”

“That’s true. Anyway, I’ve learned a lot. Aunt Eunice knocked a lot of sense into me over the summer.”

“She deserves an award of some sort for that,” Sam smarted off.

Finn said, “Be nice.”

“I am being nice. You’re the one that asked me stupid questions, sitting at this very table.”

“That’s true. Sorry about that.”

“It’s fine. You got it all straightened out now. And we’re good.”

They cleared the table when they finished.

Kurt said, “Thanks for lunch. I’m sure you’re off to a great karma cleansing or whatever it is you’re after.”

Trish dragged Finn downstairs to watch Sherlock.

“Magic or something else?” Kurt asked on the way back upstairs.

“Magic. And then snuggles and the audiobook.”

“It still amazes me that he can keep track of so many different voices and use them throughout so many different books. Doing impressions isn’t easy. I love trying, but I know I’m not great at it, but
it’s fun. But he’s like doing it all the time. It’s so cool.”

“I wonder who else is really good at it,” Kurt said. “We could look it up and then if we can’t get one of the Redwall audiobooks on interlibrary loan for a while sometime, we could check out some other series.”

“Maybe Harry Potter. You said I knew all of your secrets and I’m not hiding anything from you, but I probably never told you that I’ve only seen the movies. By the time I could read well enough to read any of them on my own, I had a lot of schoolwork to do and in the summer, I spent a lot of time watching Stevie and Stacey while my mom worked part time. When she was home, I’d go out riding my bike and out messing around in the woods and stuff, not sitting in the house reading, which would have been next to impossible with two preschoolers anyway. And then I just watched the movies instead of reading the books.”

“Well then, we’ll put the first book on hold and listen to it. The books are different from the movies.”

“They always are. The one thing that never made sense in the movies was that opening part where he was using the lumos spell to read by, when they were forbidden to do magic outside of Hogwarts.”

“Yeah, that’s not in the book and it doesn’t make any sense.”

Sam looked over in the corner at the boxes. “Are you going to go through those clothes today?”

“Do you want me to? I figured you’d rather me just wait until you were gone to do it.”

“Oh, yeah. I’m going without you.” He huffed and sighed. He wrapped his arms around Kurt tighter. “I’m not going without you.” He kissed Kurt’s shoulder. “I’m going to kidnap you and take you with me.”

“I’m going to try begging combined with bribery to see if someone will work Friday so I can be off at least one day. We could leave as soon as I get off Thursday and at least do one thing fun on Friday and then spend two days with your family.” He put his left hand over the top of Sam’s and fitted his fingers between Sam’s.

“Back to the clothes. How about we go through the box of folded up stuff. Then we can put what we don’t keep under the bed or something for me to use in trade at that one vintage shop that does trades. I won’t be able to go there for three weeks, but the box will be out of the way at least.” Kurt leaned to the left and turned his head. He looped his right hand behind Sam’s neck and used it as leverage to reach up and kiss him. “I lack motivation to get out of the bed.” He rotated more and continued to kiss Sam. “You’re so adorable and sexy.”

“The fact that you’d pick me over boxes full of vintage clothing is the best feeling ever.” Sam adjusted himself a little and got his arm wrapped around Kurt supporting him in the position that he was in. He used his other hand to run his fingers up Kurt’s neck and into his hairline at the nape of his neck. He pressed his lips to Kurt’s and started gently, but the kiss quickly heated up and lips and tongues moved against each other passionately.

Sam and Kurt dried off and hung their towels up.

“I like the massage oil. It takes less of it and it’s not sticky like lotion gets sometimes.” He stepped closer to Kurt and buried his nose in Kurt’s neck and sniffed him. “And even after you’ve
showered, you still smell tasty.” He kissed him sweetly. “Come on. I want to see you try the clothes on.”

“Let me blow dry my hair just enough that I don’t run the chance of dripping on anything.” Kurt pulled the blow dryer out and started to dry his hair.

Sam stood behind him and made faces at him in the mirror. Kurt turned around and started to use the dyer on Sam’s hair too. He put the dryer back up. When he stood up, Sam took his hand and put his other hand on Kurt’s hip and began to dance them out into their bedroom. When they got to the space between the end of the bed and the bookshelves, Sam pushed Kurt away using the hand on his hip and then moved his hand above his head and twirled Kurt into him causing Kurt to start laughing. They danced around a little more and Kurt did the same thing to Sam and put his hand on Sam’s lower back when he twirled into him and he attempted to dip Sam, which resulted in Sam lying on the floor because Kurt lowered him down when he couldn’t stand back up holding him. They both ended up laughing so much they couldn’t get up from their knees for a couple of minutes. Kurt eventually stood back up and pulled Sam to standing.

“I guess only you can dip me. Or you need to work on getting more flexible. All that swimming is making you strong, but it’s time to get you flexible.”

“We can do yoga before you go to work in the mornings.”

“You say that now, but all I hear is ‘It’s dark out – more cuddles.’” Kurt kissed him. He turned and swagged over to the box, picked it up, put it on a chair and opened it. He used the table to separate the contents of the box. There were cardigans, pajama sets, some short-sleeved shirts, and a few lightweight sweater turtlenecks. “What if I like all of everything?”

Sam looked at the stacks over Kurt’s shoulder and propped his chin. “Well, then we put it all in the closet.” He wrapped his arms around Kurt’s torso. “Let’s try the pajamas on.”

After they had put them all on, Kurt said, “Well?”

“I think we look shiny.”

Kurt rolled his eyes and laughed. “I was thinking debonair, but same difference. So, yes on the pajama sets?”

“Yes.”

“If there’s anything you like, try it on. It might fit.”

Sam picked up the black turtleneck sweater and put it on. “I’ve never worn one, but it would be good for a 60’s themed cosplay, like The Man from U.N.C.L.E or Mission Impossible.”

“Probably half of this stuff would be good for those. They wore suits. The turtleneck fits nice.”

He took it back off and laid it on the bed. “Some of those shirts remind me of bowling shirts.”

“They were leisure shirts. They were worn untucked.”

“How daring.” He wagged his eyebrows.

Kurt smiled. He put one on. “They feel a little baggy compared to what I’m used to wearing, but they’re the right size. I bet they’d fit you too though since they’re not tight in the shoulders on me.” Kurt handed him one.
He slipped it on and turned to look in the mirror on the dresser. “I think it’s my hair. I think it just kills the 60’s vibe of the clothes. I’d need my hair styled the right way to pull this stuff off.”

“Probably true, but I can do it so it will look right.”

“Of course you can. You’re awesome with stuff like this.” He turned toward Kurt. “I mean that. I’m not being sarcastic at all. You’re really amazing at it. My Mal outfit totally rocks. And I’m sure that your Simon outfit will be awesome too. You could dress Trish like Inara and Finn like Jayne.”

“Well, I’m sure Finn would love that. I’m not sure about Trish. I’d have to ask her. I don’t know what they’d wear the costumes for.”

“How about we convince Brittany to have a costume Prom this year? We could start mentioning it in passing. Show her pictures. Talk it up. Convince Santana.”

“Maybe. It would be cool, though.” Kurt continued to try the shirts on. “I’ll need to make room for these in the cabinet behind the vanity.” He left a shirt on and started trying on the cardigans. “You know I can’t resist these.”

“I know. It’s okay. Maybe there’s a 12-step program for you somewhere.” Sam patted him on the shoulder consoling him.

Kurt pursed his lips and shot a glare at Sam, but then laughed. “You might not be too far off, but I like them all.” He tried all of them on. “They stay.” He put them in the closet with his other cardigans. “I think I’ll wait on the other stuff.”

“We should probably go down and start dinner anyway.”

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After they ate, they relocated to the family room, while Finn and Trish used the dining table to study for their finals. Sam covered the coffee table with the throw the way he liked to and pulled the coffee table toward the sofa. He sat in the corner and Kurt sat in front of him, with his arm wrapped around Sam’s neck, and curled into his chest.

“I know it was a long time ago, but do you remember when we were in New York in the hotel and I was talking about whether or not New York was still my dream?”

“I do.”

“I’ve been thinking about it a lot. Our letters should arrive this coming weekend, so all of that stuff has been on my mind again.”

“I figured.”

“I feel even less like it’s that important.”

“Because of me?”

“Because of you and in a good way. I know that you will support me if that’s what I decide to pursue – whether I succeed or fail or something in between. But that desire to prove myself isn’t very strong anymore. I’m not even sure it makes any sense because I’m still determined to give it my all because I’m really not a ‘part of the way’ kind of guy.”
“I think maybe it’s your desire to get other people to approve of you that not as strong.”

“I really only survived by telling myself that I would get out of here and make a name for myself and everyone who had been awful to me would end up feeling bad about it when I wouldn’t give them the time of day after I was famous.”

“And that make a lot of sense. It was a way to focus on a future that allowed you to make it through something you should have never had to go through.”

“The longer we’re together, the less I feel the need to make it big. I still want to be amazing because that’s just me. I’m not sure I’m doing a great job of this, but I just wanted you to know how much of a difference you’ve made in my life.”

Sam let Kurt think and waited patiently for him to speak again.

“Upstairs earlier. I can’t really explain. It’s just a thousand little things. You just make my life so much better every day. Thank you. I feel like I don’t tell you often enough sometimes.”

“Even if you don’t say the words, I see it in your eyes. I appreciate you telling me though. I wielded a sword of humor when you wielded a sword of sarcasm. I tried to deflect people’s attention way from my glaring academic difficulties by being the funny guy and by focusing on my looks. Being with you has helped me not hyperfocus on what I eat and how much I exercise. I’ve become more than a hot body who tells jokes and does impressions. I’ve let the rest of me out around you. You’ve never once made me feel less intelligent than you. You listen to all of my wild and crazy ideas and respond respectfully and I think it gives me that same sense of ease and comfort and the feeling of being accepted and loved that you were describing.”

“I’m glad I make you feel that way. I want you to because I love you so very much.” He took Sam’s left hand and held it. He ran his fingers over the ring and smiled. “The first night we came down here and talked and I asked you all of those questions.”

“Mm hmm.”

“I took a lot of willpower to keep from telling you that I was already head over heels for you.”

“My confession is that I was already head over heels for you too and I was terrified I was going to answer wrong and you were going to end it before we got any more serious.”

Kurt smiled and leaned up a little and kissed Sam. “When we move out, I want to have a couch too. Even if we’re in a dorm, I want to figure out a way to have a couch if we can. It’s just different being able to sit up. I like snuggling in the bed, but I like this too. With the couch arm, you don’t have to hold me in position and we can both sit up and relax too.”

“I wonder if there are really comfortable sofa beds. That would work. Couch by day, bed by night.” He waggled his eyebrows.

“Stealth bed.”

“Something like that.”

“We’ll have to look. It seems so weird that in a little over five months we’ll be graduating.”

“I know. I was really scared that I wouldn’t.”

“But you will be.”
Finn came bounding down the stairs with Trish chasing him, closing in quickly. They came to a dead stop in front of the coffee table.

“Sorry,” Finn said. “I didn’t know you were down here.”

“It’s fine,” Kurt said. “I can move.”


Finn walked around the coffee table and sat down and put his feet up.

“Sit like Sam.”

Finn rearranged a little. Trish sat down just like Kurt was.

“It’s perfect. Where’s the remote?”

Finn grabbed it of the side table.

“I told him if he could get all of his Spanish words right, we’d watch the second episode of Castle.”

“That’s fine. What did you mean by inspirational?”

“Oh, well, I’m not new to the bullying perpetrated by jerk boys in high school. I’ve been called all sorts of things that I won’t repeat. But the thing that got to me the most was always them saying things that meant that I was too big for any guy to ever find attractive and that I’d squish anyone if I ever tried to sit on anyone’s lap or I’d break some guy’s back if he tried to piggy back me or any number of things that made it sound like I’m just hopelessly huge and unsnuggle-able and unsexy and unattractive. And it’s inspirational – because you’re like not even two inches shorter than Sam and there you sit snuggled up like it’s completely normal. I bet he only weighs 10 pounds more than you. But that’s not stopping you from sitting like that. You don’t have to be tiny to get the amazing snuggles. I don’t have to be tiny to get snuggled.” She pressed play on the remote in Finn’s hand and leaned into his chest.

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Nearly a week later, Trish picked Kurt up Saturday morning and they went to JoAnn Fabric to look at patterns. They stopped for coffee on the way.

“So, I looked through lots of dresses online. I want a 50’s style shirtdress. I want it to be sleeveless, and then I want to buy a shrug to wear or I can wear one of my cardigan’s with it. I want the full skirt, but I don’t want it to fluff out.”

“Oh, well, I’m not new to the bullying perpetrated by jerk boys in high school. I’ve been called all sorts of things that I won’t repeat. But the thing that got to me the most was always them saying things that meant that I was too big for any guy to ever find attractive and that I’d squish anyone if I ever tried to sit on anyone’s lap or I’d break some guy’s back if he tried to piggy back me or any number of things that made it sound like I’m just hopelessly huge and unsnuggle-able and unsexy and unattractive. And it’s inspirational – because you’re like not even two inches shorter than Sam and there you sit snuggled up like it’s completely normal. I bet he only weighs 10 pounds more than you. But that’s not stopping you from sitting like that. You don’t have to be tiny to get the amazing snuggles. I don’t have to be tiny to get snuggled.” She pressed play on the remote in Finn’s hand and leaned into his chest.

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After about 30 minutes of looking through the pattern books, they finally settled on one. They went to look through the dress fabric next.

“Anything but stripes or plaid. You do not have enough money to pay me to make that dress out of
striped or plaid fabric.”

She laughed. “I don’t want stripes or plaid anyway, but thanks for telling me up front. Just what would it take to get you to make that dress with striped fabric?”

“A guaranteed lead role on Broadway for a show that’s likely to make it.”

“Oh, so not that much, then.” She hip checked him. “How about this one?”

“That could work.”

She walked around to the other side. “What are these?” She pulled one of the bolts of fabric out and showed him.

“Oh, those are like practically instant dresses.”

“Explain.”

He went around to the other side and unrolled part of the bolt. “You buy enough so that this stretch part fits around your chest. Then you just sew it together and hem it the length you want it. I’d suggest adding straps if you don’t want to have to wear a strapless bra.”

“Well, why don’t we just do this? It’s not exactly what I was picturing, but it’s not bad and it’s quick. And it actually looks like it might be comfortable unlike 90% of dresses I’ve seen that are short and tight. You’d have to stand up the whole time in them or sit with your hands strategically placed while still being miserable. This looks like I could actually be reasonably comfortable.”

“We can do that. I would suggest letting me line the fabric for the lower half or you’ll have to get a slip or live with the fact that this fabric is semi-transparent in sunlight.”

“Hmm. Let me take my coat off and sort of try it out.” She laid her coat in the cart and unwrapped the fabric and wrapped it around herself. Kurt already had his phone ready and took a couple of photos. She looked at them.

“Wouldn’t this drag the ground on someone regular height?”

“Probably. But that works in your favor.”

“What do you think?”

“I think it looks fine as long as you like it. You’re not trying to buy the perfect dress, but a dress that you don’t hate. When we get up to the counter, they’re going to offer to sell you what you don’t want to buy at half-off the sale price because there will be less than a yard left on the bolt. I can use that fabric to make the straps and to make a sash that will dress it up a bit. I can also make a hair tie we can use in your hair, which I can help you curl and style.”

Kurt looked at the end of the bolt. “It’s half off and I have a coupon for 20% off the sale price. It will be less than $20.”

“Sold.”

“If your dad hates it, we can bring the fabric back as long as we don’t cut or wash it.”

“Let’s put the pattern back. What do we need for you to line it?” She followed him to what they needed.
While he got in line, she put the pattern back. He took the fabric and the slip. They got in line and checked out.

“Now where?”

“I need shoes.”

“What kind?”

“Ones to wear with the dress.”

“How about boots?”

“I think my dad wants honest-to-God girly shoes.”

“Alright. The only place you’re going to find those without ordering them might be Payless, but I usually only see the larger sizes in Columbus or Toledo.”

“A shrug?”

“Kohl’s. Then we’ll go look at Payless.”

“It’s weird without Sam here,” Trish said as she wandered around their room looking at their movies and books.

“I know. I was supposed to go with him, but it didn’t work out. And then it doubly didn’t work out when one of the other guys got sick midweek and called out on Thursday and Friday. I had to work 12 hours both days. Here, put this on and let’s see if you want me to shorten it or just hem it like it is.” He turned his back so she could put it on.

“Getting the extra fabric so cheap was helpful.” She straightened it out and looked in his closet mirror. “I think I like it as long as possible. Also, the straps are perfect. I won’t feel like it’s going to fall down. And I like the gathered effect with the elastic inside.”

“Take it back off so I can hem and line it.”

She handed it back.

“Give me your phone for a minute.” He pulled up Amazon and typed in key search words and gave it back to her. “Look through those and find something you like.”

“Okay.” She scrolled through several pages and read reviews while Kurt worked on her dress. “I found them.”

“Already?”

“Yep.” She handed him the phone.

He laughed. “Those are you. They’re perfect. Send me the link and I’ll order them and you can give me the cash your dad gave you, if you don’t want to put your credit card in. I have mine stored in my account.”

“Okay.”
Kurt clicked the link, put the shoes in his cart, and pressed the button to buy them. “Tuesday.”

“I don’t know what my dad will say.”

“Well, they will look good with the dress. The gray will look good with jeans and with any color of shorts this summer. They’re a neutral color than can go with most casual dresses, if you ever wear any other dresses. And they’re not just a complete waste of money because they have sporty bottoms like athletic shoes. And they look girly. So, I think it’s a win/win. Girly shoes that you will not hate wearing.”

“I like the round toes. No pointy-toed shoes for me. Hopefully they’re comfortable.”

Once Kurt finished, she tried the dress on for a last look to see if anything else needed done. She looked in the mirror again.

“It’s good. Let’s go show my dad. He’s going to the game with us. Actually, I’ll just leave it on and put my sneakers and coat on. I’ll change back after he sees it. No point in changing two more times.”

At 8:30, Kurt had dinner ready and in the oven on warm. He read a book while he waited for Sam in the living room. The instant he heard the key go into the lock, he was up. He put the book down and stood in front of the foyer closet waiting for Sam to get the door open. As soon as he stepped inside and closed the door, Kurt put the code in and then wrapped his arms around Sam’s neck and kissed him.

“I missed you.”

“I missed you too.” He slipped his coat off and put it in the closet, and then hugged Kurt.

“I have dinner ready.”

“It smells good. I’ll run this up and come right back.”

“Can you take my book on the end table with you?”

Sam grabbed it as he went past. Kurt served their food and took it into the dining room and sat down. Sam sat down next to him just a minute later.

“It’s good. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome. Did you have fun decorating today?”

“I did. It would have been even more fun if you had been there, though. Stevie and Stacey missed you too. They sent pictures back for you. Three guesses for the theme.”

“Our wedding.”

“Bingo. We have a winner!”

“What do I win?”

Sam turned toward him and kissed him.

“Mmm. Nice prize.”
“So, what did you do today?”

“You’ll see when we go upstairs.”

“The dress you made looked nice.”

“I think so too. She ordered some shoes. Her dad liked it, which was the important part. So, she lived up to her end and she gets to wear the Malcom costume in some of her senior pictures. I don’t think Dad or Carole must really be into the senior picture thing or maybe they’ve just been so busy that they haven’t had time to think about it. She has to have four outfits, and the photographer is doing multiple backgrounds with props and stuff.”

“Sounds pricey.”

“I didn’t ask. She’s wearing her basketball uniform, one of the outfits she got on Black Friday, the Malcom costume, and the dress.”

“Did you have time to look at places for spring break?”

“Mostly I just looked at stuff in DC. When Carole gets back, I’m going to ask to borrow the book that Trish gave her. How about you clear the table and come upstairs in five minutes?”

“Sure.”

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The door was open and Sam walked in, but he didn’t see Kurt.

“Kurt?”

“Close your eyes.” He waited a few seconds before coming out of the bathroom. “Open them.”

“You made the vest. It’s perfect. And that black coat looks great.”

“I took the pants up and put the darts in the shirt too. Everything’s done.”

“Well, it’s amazing. We’re going to look fabulous.”

“Take my picture. I told Trish I’d send her one once I was done.”

Sam grabbed Kurt’s phone and took a photo. Kurt hung the pieces up and put the costume in the closet. Sam pulled out the pictures from Stevie and Stacey and put them in the table. He dumped his dirty clothes in the basket and plopped down on the floor in front of the bookshelf.

“These pictures are adorable. I see that Stacey’s drawings feature her in a white dress.”

“She thinks she will get to be the flower girl, but if we wait until we’re older, I think she will just be a bridesmaid or whatever would be a reasonable term to use since there will be no bride.”

“Attendant.”

“Ah. She will be one of the attendants then, along with Stevie. And Finn, I’m assuming.”

“And if we’re all still friends, Nick and Jeff. And if Finn stays with Trish, I’d ask her. I’m rooting for them to stay together. I like her.”
“I do too.”

“She missed you too. She said it was weird without you here.”

“Usually I make things weird, not un-weird.”

“Why are you on the floor?”

“Because I want to play something.”

“We have a table to play games at.”

“You didn’t let me finish.”

“Sorry.”

“Because I want to play something, but I’ve been sitting for three hours and I want to stretch first.”

“Okay. Do you want company? Or is this a spectator sport where I get to watch you stretch?” Kurt didn’t wait for an answer and he knelt down straddling Sam who was lying flat on his back. He put his hands right above Sam’s shoulders. He moved his feet so that they were between Sam’s and he assumed a push-up position. “One.” He lowered himself and kissed Sam and pushed back up. “Two.” He continued his kiss push-ups until he got to ten. When he lowered himself again he changed his position and lay down on top of Sam without putting all of his weight on him.

“Well, that was fun.”

Kurt kissed him once more and stood up. “Put your feet up.” Kurt grabbed his ankles and helped him stretch out his lower back. “Now draw your knees up to your chest.” Kurt pushed back on his feet some to increase the stretch. He let go and let Sam stretch back out flat. “Better?”

“Maybe I don’t want to play any games. You in your underwear helping me stretch is not making me think of board games.”

“I can put some clothes on.”

“No way. With going to Kentucky, I almost forgot that it’s Sunday. I already missed out on hours of snuggles today. No clothes for you. No clothes for me. A shower and a snuggle and whatever book we’re listening to. We can play games another time.”

Monday evening, Kurt made it home in time to eat dinner with everyone. Burt and Carole talked about their trip to DC. She showed everyone the pictures she had taken of the apartment they rented. Sam talked about seeing his family. Finn talked about the basketball game where he had scored the winning shot. Kurt showed Carole the picture of his Simon costume and Trish in her dress and asked to borrow her DC travel guidebook. Kurt asked Sam how the swim meet went and Sam told them that came in third again. When the teens were cleaning up after dinner, Carole went to their room and brought the book back for Kurt.

Kurt sat at the table and looked through the book. “There’s a lot of free stuff. If we stay in Dad’s apartment and we do the free stuff, it shouldn’t cost that much. We can just take groceries with us.”

“How long is the drive?”
“Less than 8 hours according to the internet. I’d say we should allot 9 because we’ll stop at least once.”

“Oh, I need to tell you. Sue came in today during our ‘final’ and reminded everyone about how we had agreed to sing at the homeless shelter. Everyone doing the TV show isn’t going. I figured the two of us could still go. Quinn’s going. Brittany’s family must be leaving after Christmas Eve because she and Rory are still doing the show.”

“That’s fine. What time do we need to be there?”

“5:00. Dinner starts at 5:30. We’re just serving and then singing.”

“Okay. Games tonight?”

“Definitely.”

After Sam beat Kurt at Dominoes three times in a row, Kurt decided it was time for a new game. He put them back in the cabinet and remembered the mail that had come on Saturday.

“We were so caught up in our snuggles last night, I forgot to tell you that our letters came Saturday. Do you want to open them?”

“Yes and no.”

“I feel the same way.”

“We need to though. If we didn’t get in anywhere, we’ll need to apply to the other places we were considering.”

“I know. The deadline for regular admission is in about three weeks.” Kurt picked up all four of the letters. He handed two of them to Sam.

Kurt sat on the end of bed criss-cross. Sam sat at the head of the bed facing him. They both put the envelopes out in front of them.

“This is really nerve wracking,” Sam said.

“It really is.” Kurt got up and got a letter opener and sat back down. He slit the tops of both of his open and handed it to Sam.

He slit his open as well. He pulled the first one out. Kurt looked to see which one he had opened and pulled his letter out. Sam moved on to the second one. Kurt did the same.

Sam was the first to speak. “I got one acceptance and one rejection.”

“Both of mine are acceptance letters.”

“I got offered scholarships.”

“That’s amazing. Can I see?”

Sam handed him the acceptance letter.

Kurt read through the second page of Sam’s letter. “They’re renewable and with the estimated Pell
Grant and the scholarship, your cost will be less than $1000.”

“I saw. I’m stunned.”

“It’s amazing, sweetie.”

“Did you get any financial aid?”

“Surprisingly, yes. A $2000 scholarship towards tuition, based on my GPA and my test scores. I didn’t expect to get anything. We both knew I wouldn’t get any grants. My parents’ income combined with mine is too high.”

“$2000 is good, especially considering you expected not to get any.”

“It is. Do you not want to go? You don’t seem excited.”

“I’m just shocked, like I said. I really expected to get two rejection letters. I never even considered that I might get a scholarship.”

Kurt picked up their letters carefully and put them on the dresser. He sat back down closer to Sam and took his hands. “You’re a really good artist.”

Tears streamed down Sam’s cheeks. “I did it. I did what I didn’t think I could do.”

“You did. We need to send in the housing forms to get our names at the top of the list since they’re sorted by date received.”

“Will you fill mine out too?”

“Sure.” Kurt took the form and return envelope from Sam’s envelope and his own and sat at the table and filled them in. “I need your social security number.” He put down what Sam said, finished the forms, and put them in the envelopes. “I’ll mail them in on the way to work in the morning.”

“I should tell my parents. I’m going to call them.”

“While you do that, I’ll go tell Dad and Carole.”

Kurt went downstairs and saw them sitting in the living room before he got to the bottom of the stairs.

“Can I talk to the two of you?”

“Sure, honey. What’s up?”

“Sam and I got our early application letters. Where’s Finn?”

“Not here,” she said.

“Okay. We both applied to the same two places. I got into both. Sam got into one. He got a full tuition scholarship, well it’s two scholarships, but combined they’ll cover his tuition and books. His grant prediction was shown as well. It should cost him less than $1000 a year.”

“That’s fantastic.”
“It is. I was offered a $2000 scholarship based on my grades and test scores.”

“That’s good, kiddo. I knew you wouldn’t get grants. Are you two going to accept?”

“Sam’s in shock, but I think so.”

“I bet he is,” Carole said.

“He’s calling his parents right now.”

Burt asked, “So, you’re not going to apply to any places in New York?”

“I did – to one. Sam is applying to two in New York. I might apply to another one. The deadline for it isn’t until the first week in January. We don’t have to accept until April, but we’re sending in our housing request tomorrow morning because room choices are processed by date of request. They have these rooms there that have a larger open space, a smaller room with a door for the beds, and a private bathroom. That’s what we’re applying for. That way we don’t have to deal with any possible bathroom issues because we’re gay.”

“That makes sense. You don’t seem very excited.”

“I am. It’s just weird. Seeing it written on paper makes graduating feel a lot more real. And it’s just weird that it’s finally so close.”

Carole said, “I’m assuming that you still don’t want Finn to know yet. Just so you know, he did apply to a few places already that had December 1st deadlines. He has a couple of other places he’s still considering. Trish has been good for him. She showed him the places she’s applying to and he saw that there were places that he could get into with his grades and test scores. Toledo, Dayton, and Findlay maybe. I don’t remember which ones had the earlier dates. We won’t say anything.”

“Thanks. I’m not spending that much time at McKinley, but I don’t want to everyone to belittle my choices.”

“We understand. We’re glad for both of you and proud of you. You’ve both worked hard.”

Kurt went back upstairs.

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Kurt snuggled up to Sam’s side. “What did your parents say?”

“I’m surprised you couldn’t hear my mom squealing all the way downstairs. My dad said, ‘We’re proud of you, Son.’ in the very serious tone he always uses when he says that. I told them we’re still applying to other places and we hadn’t made up our minds, but that I had a place to go that I could afford, even if the rest turn out to not work out.”

“I got a similar reaction out of Dad. Carole just smiled, no squealing.”

“Well, your parents expected you to get into college. Mine were happily surprised.”

“Seeing it written on a piece of paper is still a relief. I knew my grades were good enough to get into college to study something, but I really didn’t know if I was good enough to get into musical theatre program.”

Kurt took a deep breath and melted into Sam. “We did it.”
“We did.”

“S’too dark to get up.”

“I know, sweetie. I’m not getting up. The comforter slipped down and I’m cold. I was just trying to get closer to you and warm up.”

“S’a good idea. Closer.”

Kurt scooted up tighter behind Sam. He kissed him on the back of the neck and pulled the comforter back up over their shoulders.

“S’better.”

Two hours later, Kurt woke up again. This time, it was light outside.

“So, what the plan for today?”

“I’m not sure there is much of one. I held off making plans any under the assumption that Carole would eventually tell us what we were doing. Maybe we should just put our pajamas on and go downstairs and see.”

“Let’s go then.”

When they got downstairs, they found Carole in the living room getting ready to decorate.

“Good morning, you two. Do you want to help?”

“Sure,” Sam said.

“I did a lot of thinking – and talking with Burt while we were gone. Unless it’s going to bother anyone, from now on we’re just going to do a small amount of decorating. We’re looking at three years of us splitting time between Lima and DC. I already talked to Finn, like I told you. So, we’re thinking of decorating the fireplace and hanging stockings for everyone. I got a few of those flameless candles like you got to sit on the fireplace. I got everyone new stockings, including Trish. I didn’t have names or anything put on them, but I’ll have that done by next Christmas.”

“That’s fine with me,” Kurt said. He picked up the garland. “How are we attaching it?”

“I bought some removable hooks. They’re in the bag somewhere.”

Sam started opening the flameless candles and put them on the mantle where Carole had already placed little circular sections of fabric holly. Kurt helped Carole get the garland up. Once it was up, all three of them opened the stocking hangers and Kurt grabbed some scissors to take the tags off the stockings.

“You had a really small blue stocking and Finn had a green one that was much too large to actually hang. I didn’t have one and Burt had a red one. I bought two blue ones for your and Sam, two green ones for Finn and Trish, and two deep red ones for me and Burt. All of them have the same green, red, and blue small plaid patterned bands at the top.”

“Sounds good to me,” Kurt said.
Sam agreed, “No objections from me.”

Kurt took one out of the bag. “I know the easiest way to personalize them that could be done today, even.”

“What’s that, honey?”

“Keychain initial charms. I can just take the keyring off and stitch the charm on to the corner of the band not far from where the loop is attached and it will hang down where it can be seen. I could get silver ones to go with the silver hangers you bought for them.”

“That sounds perfect.”

“We can go out and look after we get dressed. If there’s anything else you still need for today or tomorrow, you can make a list.”

They finished up putting up everything she had bought and removed the boxes and packaging. Carole was still in the room when they came back.

“I have one last thing. I bought a set of lights to go around the door. Can the two of you put them up?”

“Sure.”

“Thanks. They’re sitting by the front door. I’m going to go make us some breakfast while you get them up.”

“So we’re going to do what we did on Black Friday? I get in line and you go grab what we need?”

“If the line has more than 10 people in it, yes.”

Sam turned Kurt’s face toward him and kissed him. “Let’s do it.”

They stepped inside Michael’s to find a long line. Sam got in line and Kurt went to find the keychains and the napkins Carole had requested. And somehow she was missing one holly candle wreath. He found the letters he needed and bought different styles, all trimmed in silver. Once he had everything he stepped into line with Sam. They didn’t have to wait too long before they were able to check out.

When they stepped outside, Sam took Kurt’s hand. “Where to next?”

“The Dollar Tree unless it’s super crowded, in which case, Finn will just get his candy in a gift bag that’s too big.”

They walked down the sidewalk and looked in.

Sam said, “Too big sounds good to me.”

Later that afternoon, they arrived at the homeless shelter with a few minutes to spare. They went inside, found Coach Sylvester, and got their assignments. They helped carry the trays of food out to the serving area and stood at their spots ready to serve. Once everyone had been through the line, Kurt, Sam, and Quinn moved to the other side of the room. Sam played his guitar while the three
of them sang Christmas songs. Their performance wasn’t award-worthy, but it was appreciated and the people sang along with and enjoyed themselves, which was the whole point.

More people came in to eat, but they were running low on food. About 6:30, the rest of the Glee Club showed up with more food, which someone had made for the Christmas special. They added it to what was left and they had enough to serve everyone that had come.

Surprisingly Puck sat down at the piano and started to play. Everyone joined in and sang along to Frosty, Rudolph, and some other non-religious Christmas-themed songs. When they finished, they helped distribute the gifts to the kids. Their names had been on an angel tree at the mall, so each of the kids actually got something they had asked for and something they’re parents had written that they needed. All of the kids were excited about the presents they had gotten.

The New Directions helped pick up the wrapping paper and helped get a few stubborn boxes with toys in them open. They set out plates of cookies on each of the tables, and then began to clear the area where the food had been served. A few of them stayed and helped with the clean up as well.

When they were leaving, Kurt said, “We don’t have to be at the house until 8:00. Let’s drive around for just a few minutes and look at the lights.” Kurt gave him directions on which way to go.

About halfway down one of the streets, Sam heard Kurt sniffling a little. He put his hand on Kurt’s lap. “Are you okay?”

“I shouldn’t have had you come this way, even though I wanted to.” Kurt pointed to the right. “That’s our old house. My mom and dad and I lived there until she died and then it was just me and my dad until he and Carole got married and bought the house we live in now. I didn’t want a bigger, better house. When they first told us they were getting married, Dad said he was going to have an addition put on the house. I was never told why, but they decided to buy the house we live in now instead.”

“I had been to Finn’s old house, but not yours. He had the football team over a few times.”

“Yeah.”

“The new house is a lot bigger, but I still like the old house better. We better head back home or we’ll be late.”

Finn and Trish were already sitting in the dining room when they got there. They hung their coats up and joined them. Carole had made the taco casserole that everyone liked. After they finished eating and cleaned up, they went into the living room.

“So, Burt and Kurt’s tradition was to exchange one gift on Christmas Eve and open their stockings early Christmas morning before breakfast. Ours was to open everything on Christmas Day before lunch. We’ve come to a middle ground. We’re going to exchange the gifts from the name draw tonight and tomorrow after breakfast, you can open your stockings.”

“We’re having Christmas breakfast?”

“Yes, at 9:00, which is much later than Kurt usually gets up and earlier than you get up. That’s the middle ground.”
“Okay.”

Carole distributed the gifts. After she sat back down, she opened hers first. She found the next two books in the mystery series she was reading. “These are perfect. Thanks.”

Finn asked, “Are we going to tell who bought the gift or is it going to stay a secret?”

Trish answered, “When I’ve done these before, everyone waits until the end and then tries to guess.”

Finn shrugged and nodded. “Okay.” He was sitting next to Carole, so he went next. He unwrapped a small bottle that he had to read to figure out what it was. He wrapped it back up and sat it beside him. He opened the bag to look inside and laughed. “Alright! Some of my favorite candy. Someone’s been to Cracker Barrel. Thanks, it’s awesome.”

Trish was sitting to his left and opened hers next. She pulled out a set of hair bands and a silver, black, and tortoise shell decorative pieces. Next she took out a long necklace similar to her owl necklace, with a butterfly pendant instead. “This is really pretty. I’m afraid that whoever bought these hair things for me will have to explain it to me, but they’re really pretty too. Thanks.”

Kurt was next. He already figured out what his was. He tore the paper off. “It’s perfect.” It was a cutting mat with a rotary cutter.

Sam unwrapped what he knew to be a DVD case. “*Dr. Horrible’s Sing Along Blog!* It’s perfect. Thank you.”

Burt opened his and pulled out a black baseball cap with – Hummel Tires and Lube – embroidered in a block print with – Est. 1962 Lima, Ohio – embroidered in Arial underneath. “Well, I’ll be. I’ve never had any swag for the shop. I hadn’t even thought about this coming year being the 50th anniversary of the shop opening. I love this. I’m going to wear this in DC.”

Carole said, “So does everyone want to guess?”

Kurt spoke up first. “I think Trish got mine.”

“Correct,” she said. “I think Carole drew my name.”

“You’re right. I’ll show you how those hair things work, or Kurt can. I’ll guess next. Burt.”

“She’s right, but in my defense, she was with me when I was out anywhere near a place to shop. She saw me come out of the bookstore.”

“That’s true,” she teased. “But they’re perfect.”

“Okay,” Burt said. “That leaves, Kurt, Sam, or Finn. I think Sam.”

“You got it.”

“I love the hat.” He adjusted the bill to the curve he liked and put it on. “I look fancy now. Nice black hat to go with all my new black dress pants.”

Kurt rolled his eyes.

“I knew I could get him to do that,” Burt teased. “I am going to wear it though. I’m a proud small business owner. And if they don’t like my new fancy hat, I don’t care.”
Sam said, “That leaves Finn for mine.”

“Yep, and I already knew who got mine before we started guessing. It was Kurt.”

Kurt leaned over and picked one of the hair bands up. “It comes with more than one and these are replaceable anyway. What you do is you put the decorative part on top of a hair band you’ve already put in. You use another one the same color and you loop it over this and wrap it under and then loop it on the other side. Hold out your thumb and I’ll show you.” He demonstrated how to put it on. “The decorative parts have little teeth on the underside to keep them from sliding off. Some people wear them without another hair band in, but your hair is really thick and I think it won’t stay in place well like that. You can adjust the length of the looped hair band by tying knots across the center until it’s the right length. Or you can just buy the smaller hair bands.”

“Will you put the silver one in my hair and take a picture?”

“Sure.” He looped both ends and took the picture and showed her.

“That looks really nice.” She spoke louder so Carole would hear her. “I get how they go in now. Look,” she turned so Carole could see.

“It looks good.”

“It does. I like them. The necklace is cool too. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Are you sure your dad’s okay with you staying?”

“Yes. I have to be home by 11:30 tomorrow. Both of my brothers are here. They’ll stay up late tonight talking and watching whatever sports stuff and they’ll all sleep in and we’ll have a big lunch about 12:30. They were old enough to have given up getting up at the crack of dawn by the time I was born. They’re 12 and 14 years older than me. So, I don’t really remember much from living with them. They had both moved out before I started school. It’s complicated. We coexist for my dad’s sake. They’ll be gone by the time Finn comes over for dinner tomorrow night. My dad and I will open presents after they leave.”

“Okay, honey.” Carole spoke a little louder. “There’s brownies for dessert and ice cream.”

Finn was up on his feet and headed toward the kitchen. He came back with a brownie half eaten. “Are you all coming?”

Sam got up and so did Kurt. Finn stopped Kurt as he walked past and got him to follow him to the other side of the living room while everyone else went the other direction.

Kurt said, “The oil is just what it says it is. I found it online when I was looking for something. It’s supposed to help with sore muscles. That’s it. It smells nice and works to help relieve muscle tension. It’s got magnesium in it. It’s not something kinky. I thought since both of you play basketball and get sore muscles, it would be something the two of you could actually use.”

“Okay. I was just making sure. I didn’t want to leave it sit out on my dresser if it was something kinky that Mom would wonder about.”

“You might actually let her try it sometime when she says her legs hurt when she gets off. If it helps, I can get her a bottle too.”

“Sure. And thanks for the candy. It’s awesome.”
“You’re welcome.”

Kurt had put the bottle of massage oil next to the bed, next to the space heater before they went to bed. He turned it on when he woke up.

“C’mere. Late breakfast.”

“Mmm hmm, but I want to give you a massage. Why don’t you go to the bathroom and come back? I’ll put the blanket on the bed.”

“M’kay.” He lay down in the middle of the bed when he came back in.

Kurt massaged him everywhere.

“You are really good at this.” Sam ran his hands down Kurt’s shoulder and arms, stopping at his wrist, but not letting go.

“I’m glad you think so. You’re the only one who will ever get a massage from me.”

“Super secret massage skills.”

Kurt leaned down and kissed him. “All for you and only you. Shower?”

“In a few minutes after I completely catch my breath.”

After breakfast, they reassembled in the living room and found their stockings were off the mantle and filled, placed around the room on the furniture. Kurt sat on the floor in front of the chair where Sam sat. Trish followed Kurt’s lead and Finn sat behind her. Burt and Carole sat on the sofa.

“There’s one gift from Santa in the stockings, the rest is filling with snacks and treats.”

Each of them reached inside and found the non-food object and pulled it out. Burt went first this time. He unwrapped a leather cell phone holder that fastened to a belt. “This is perfect. I’m always taking my phone out to sit down and then I leave it lay somewhere. This way I can sit down with it in this holder and hopefully not lose it. Thanks, sweetheart.” He caught himself. “I mean Santa did good.”

Finn went next, but before he could pull anything out, Carole reminded him that Santa bought things people needed. He unwrapped a pack of his favorite socks, but looked kind of confused.

“There are two more packs.”

He smiled and nodded. “These are my favorites. Thanks. And you already gave me the new pajama pants. They’re great. No more high-waters, which Trish confiscated already anyway.”

She ran her hand along his calf. She opened hers next. “Oh, wow. It’s perfect. She stood up and put it around her waist. It matches my new gray suede Timberlands and the gray Mary Janes I got to wear for nice occasions. Thank you. It’s so soft. Usually I don’t like belts because they’re stiff, but this one is perfect.” She rolled it back up and sat down.

Kurt opened his next. “The dress shears I’ve wanted. These are way too much.”
“Santa had a fantastic coupon,” Carole whispered.

“I see. Well good for Santa because I’ve wanted a pair of these for a long time. Thank you.”

She nodded.

Sam was last and opened his and found the set of pencils and the paintbrushes he needed. “These are exactly what I need for next semester. Thanks.”

Kurt stood up and took a card down off the mantle, handed it to Burt, and sat back down. He leaned into Sam’s leg and Sam leaned forward and propped on one elbow and put his other hand on Kurt’s shoulder.

“What’s this?”

“It’s for both of you from all of us,” Kurt answered.

Burt opened it and Carole practically gasped. “Melting Pot! I’ve wanted to go to one of those ever since I heard about them.”

“There’s one near Washington, DC. After you two get the apartment settled, you can go out for a nice dinner together,” Kurt said.

“Thank you – all of you. That was really sweet.”

“I’m not sure what it is, but if she’s that excited about, it must be something,” Burt teased.

“The rest of the day is to lounge around or whatever.”

“Come downstairs. We can watch *Dr. Horrible’s Sing Along Blog* before Trish has to go home.” Sam got up and ran upstairs to grab the movie.

The other three headed downstairs.

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“Why did I let the three of you talk me into going to a dance club? I am admittedly the worst dancer I know.”

“It’s about having fun, Finn,” Kurt said, “You don’t have to be good at it to have fun doing it. Plus, Trish already likes you. You don’t have to try to win her over with your sick moves or anything.”

“That’s true,” she said. “Plus, you’re a perfectly good slow dancer. That’s the part that matters to me.”

His face lit up. She leaned towards him and kissed him.

“What did we say about the kissing?” Kurt asked.

“Not where you can see,” Trish sassed back. “And if you’re driving properly, your eyes will be facing forwards watching the road, not on me kissing Finn. Plus, I believe the rule was about making out, not kissing. And you and Sam must be doing it all wrong if you think that was making out.”

Sam laughed.
“Anyway,” Kurt said. “It was stay home or come with us to Columbus and have fun at the dance club or go to the Rachel Berry Train Wreck Extravaganza – the New Year’s Eve Edition.”

“Ugh. Right. Dance club in Columbus. And tomorrow COSI. And Jeff and Nick are meeting us at the museum.”

They met up outside the museum and went in together. After they got tickets, they put their coats in lockers. They had all worn their 221B hoodies.

“Hey, when did those two get hoodies?” Jeff asked.

“Um, a couple of weeks ago,” Sam said. “She converted Finn.”

Jeff hugged her. “Good job.”

She hugged him back. “Thanks.”

Nick said, “We need to get someone to take our picture. Give me a sec.” He came back with a woman who might as well have been wearing a shirt that said “Grandma” on it.

She took several shots for them with Nick’s camera.

“Thank you!” they all said.

“Oh, you’re welcome. I’m glad to see teenagers out doing something fun. What’s a 221B?”

“We’re Sherlock Holmes fans,” Jeff answered.

A big smile grew on her face. “Well, isn’t that something? 221B Baker Street. I hope you all have a good time.” She gave Nick his camera back.

“Oh, you’re welcome. I’m glad to see teenagers out doing something fun. What’s a 221B?”

“We’re Sherlock Holmes fans,” Jeff answered.

A big smile grew on her face. “Well, isn’t that something? 221B Baker Street. I hope you all have a good time.” She gave Nick his camera back.

“Okay, where to first?” Sam asked.

Sebastian said, “Let’s just start at the top and look at everything and work our way down.”

After they left the museum they went to a Chinese restaurant. They added two chairs and sat in the round corner booth together so they could talk more easily.

“So, what did you do over break?” Jeff asked.

“Worked 154 hours and sewed,” Kurt said. “Watched some movies and those Castle DVDs. A little reading, some games.”

Sam said, “All that minus the 154 hours of work. I did a lot of painting and drawing and I really put in a lot of hours on my handwriting. I can finally write on wide-rule regular paper.”

Nick said, “That’s great. I know it’s taken you months and months. What about you two?”

Trish answered, “We worked afternoons at the Y the last two weeks for the kids sports camp they ran during break. The rest was movies, Castle, COD, Halo, some shopping for Christmas. Relaxing. What about you guys?”
“We watched stuff, played video games, sat in the hot tub listening to music, mostly being lazy compared to the four of you.”

Sebastian said, “No, the honor of claiming the most lazy goes to me.”

Dylan said, “That’s true. I spent a lot of time at OSU with my dad working on some art pieces. When they’re done I’ll let you all see. My mum came and watched. I also went to all of the places she wanted to see. This was her first time coming to Ohio, so we just had fun while she was here. She went back yesterday.”

The server brought their dishes out. They continued to talk while they ate. Once they finished, Nick, Jeff, Dylan, and Sebastian were headed to Dalton since the next day would be the beginning of the new semester. They all hugged before they went their separate ways.
Chapter 28

Sam had swim practice Monday morning since they had a meet that afternoon and Coach Roz had decided not to hold swim practice over break. Kurt was sitting in the bleachers watching when he got a text from Santana. He told her where he was.

A few minutes later, Santana sat down on the bench next to him. “What are we going to do about the two clubs?”

“Why are you asking me? I’m not the leader of the New Directions,” Kurt answered.

“We both know that you should be. We were going to let New Directions join us if we won so that we could all still go to Regionals anyway, so are we going to go as a team or as competitors again?”

“I’d prefer to go together because there’s no way that the Regionals judges will declare another tie.”

“Fine, but Rachel isn’t the leader anymore. Neither is Finn. He lost that right when he outed me. And she lost that right when she caused you to lose the election. I wanted you to win, but then you gave Brittany the idea to run and so I supported her. And even though I wanted her to win, I didn’t want you to get disqualified because RACHEL cheated. And yes, the past is the past, but those two need their leadership to be in the past.” She got up. “I’m going to go talk to Ms. Corcoran.”

Santana sat next to Kurt. “I went to the Troubletones room and Miss Pillsbury was there and told us that Ms. Corcoran won’t be back to teach this semester.”

“Why not?” Kurt asked.

“She didn’t say. She just told us to go to the choir room, so here we are.” She moved and took a seat near the other Troubletones.

The bell rang and Mr. Schuester, Principal Beiste, and Miss Pillsbury walked in. Everyone quieted down. Principal Beiste stayed put, while the other two sat down.

“I regret to inform you that Ms. Corcoran opted to not return for this semester. The groups will rejoin under the New Directions name and the group will be returning to school club status. What this means is that you will not receive credit for being in this class. Those of you who needed this period to be for a credit will have to choose a new course that is available during first period on Mondays and Wednesdays or you will need to switch your current Study Hall to a credited course. That’s why Miss Pillsbury is here. Anyone who falls into that group, will need to have their schedules adjusted.”

Santana turned to look at the rest of the group. She stood up. “Can we go out in the hall and talk?”

Principal Beiste nodded. All of the Troubletones got up and went with Santana.

“I can’t stay if I don’t get credit. I already have two study halls. I’ll have to pick something else,” Sugar said.
“Me too.”

Santana spoke up. “Who can stay if it’s not for credit?”

Only Brittany and Mercedes raised their hands.

“None of the rest of you?”

They all shook their heads.

One of them said, “We were in classes for credit first period last semester when this started. Some of us just switched to this class, and the rest of us rearranged our schedules.”

Santana, Brittany, and Mercedes went back inside.

Santana said, “The girls in the hall need to readjust their schedules.”

Miss Pillsbury said, “Have them come back inside.”

Santana went and retrieved them.

Principal Beiste asked, “Who else needs a class for credit to replace this one? Stand up.”

Most everyone stood up.

Miss Pillsbury said, “I printed copies of the other courses that are available during this class time.” She handed the stack to Santana, who started handing them out. “If you see something on that list that you’re willing to switch to, please sit over here to my right. Move your chairs if you need to.” She gave them time to look through the list and within a couple of minutes, several people had moved. A few minutes later, about half of them had moved.

“Alright. Those of you who don’t see something on that list that will work for you will have to come with me to my office and talk to me and we’ll see what else is available by switching your study hall to something else. Everyone who sees something suitable, write your name at the top of your paper and circle your choice and get in line.” She took out a pad of passes and wrote one for each person to head to their chosen class. Once everyone had their passes, she said, “Come to my office at lunch and I’ll have your textbook for your new class ready for you to pick up.” She dismissed all of them to leave.

“The rest of you will need to come to my office with me. Kurt and Sam, I’ll have to talk to someone in the Dual Credit Program office to know what to do, but here’s a list of what’s available. You can look at it in case they say that you can’t take a study hall.” She handed them her last sheet. “Everyone else that needs a class for credit needs to follow me down to my office so I can look at the master class schedule to work your schedules out.”

Even the people who didn’t have to take another class followed her out to see what other options there were. Sam and Kurt were the only two left in the room.

Principal Beiste said, “Alright. Kurt and Sam, come with me and I’ll work on your issue while Miss Pillsbury is working with the others.”

“Sure,” Sam said.
They sat down and waited to be called into her office.

“Have a seat boys.” She closed the door behind them. “The only way this is going to work and Kurt still be in the club is for it to meet before school.”

Kurt said, “Okay. As long as we don’t just horse around. I’m not coming to school an hour early to do nothing. I had hoped that Ms. Corcoran would have a positive influence, but now she’s gone. What if we just don’t start meeting until a month before Regionals? Four weeks, three days a week for an hour would be 12 hours, which isn’t much but it’s better than waiting until the week before.”

Sam said, “But if Mr. Schue has to have the songs arranged and choreographed before we start to meet, we could do five days the last week and even a Sunday rehearsal if we’re not ready.”

Kurt took his phone out to look at his calendar. “Maybe we could just start meeting in February. The last swim meet is the first Monday of February. Then we could meet without having any conflicts with Sam’s swim practices. And that would give us six weeks to rehearse, instead of just four like I said the first time.”

“That could work,” Coach Beiste said. “Or the students who want to help work on the choreography could go ahead and come in the next few weeks.”

“That’s true. I’ll get everyone to meet tomorrow before school,” Kurt said.

“Let’s get to the bookstore,” Kurt said. “We need to buy whatever books we need for that Modern World History course Coach Beiste just got us added to. I know it wasn’t on your list of classes you’d want to take, but it should transfer as a core required course to wherever we end up, so it’s better than taking something with dubious transfer potential.”

“It’s fine. It’s not really my thing, but it won’t be my thing next year either. I’ll just get it over with. It will probably be fine. I liked history a lot more last year after you started reading the textbook to me. I could remember a lot more of it that way.”

They found the books they needed and split the cost. From the bookstore, they quickly headed to their English course. They specifically had looked for the section being taught by the instructor they had the previous semester and managed to get into it. When she came in, she saw them sitting together and smiled.

After English, they went to the Modern World History class. When it was over, they stayed and talked to the instructor for a few minutes. They ate lunch and Sam dropped Kurt off at the shop before heading back to McKinley to leave with the team for the swim meet.

“I’ll pick you up at 6:00,” Sam said. He leaned over the console and met Kurt halfway for a goodbye kiss. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Tuesday morning, Santana and Kurt waited for everyone to get there, including Mr. Schue.

Once they sat down, Kurt said, “After everything was resolved this yesterday, the only option we have that allows everyone to still participate is for us to meet before school.”
Groans were heard all across the room.

Artie asked, “Why can’t we meet after school like we used to?”

Santana said, “After school conflicts with the Cheerios schedule that has already been set for this semester until Nationals. So, it’s before school or not at all.” She continued, “I’ll say this now. If we meet before school, it better be for a reason. None of this sight-singing or listening to Gregorian chant stuff that I’ve heard went on in here last semester. It better be like Cheerios practice.” She turned and looked directly at Mr. Schue. “You need to step up your game, Mr. Schue. Let’s pick songs, divide up the parts, and get the arrangements done. Once everything is ready, we can start meeting. I don’t do social clubs at 7:00 in the morning when it’s subarctic and dark outside.”

Kurt said, “If we start meeting the first week in February, we’ll be able to meet any morning before school and we’ll have six weeks to get ready for Regionals. I suggest we do one group number, one all-girls number, and one all-guys number. That will allow us to meet four mornings a week and work on all three songs for two hours each week. And that way if any of the Troubletones don’t want to be in our group number, they can just come to the two all-girls rehearsals each week.”

Santana said. “Also, Rachel and Finn are not automatically this group’s leaders. This is a new combined group that will be using the New Directions name because Principal Beiste said so. But there will be new leaders.”

Rachel began to protest.

“Shut it, Rachel,” Santana said. “It was your diva attitude that ripped the group in two to start with. Then you got Kurt disqualified by cheating. Cheaters do not lead clubs. We’re holding elections right now. There will be co-captains. One girl, one guy.” She went to the white board and picked up a marker. I’m taking nominations.” She wrote Kurt’s name on the board. “I nominate Kurt. Next.”

Brittany raised her hand and said, “Santana.”

Santana wrote her name on the board. She looked around. “Anyone else?” She waited for a couple of minutes. “If there are no more nominations, then we don’t need an election. Everyone except Kurt and Mr. Schue can leave after you sign in on this sheet and put the number you want used to get texts about Glee Club.”

Everyone signed the sheet and left, except for Sam and Brittany, who sat back down to wait for Kurt and Santana.

Santana said, “Look, Mr. Schue, I’m going to be straight with you. I don’t know what your problem is or what the deal is with your lack of focus. But starting to practice so close to Sectionals was lame and you know it. Maybe next year, you should just have a Glee Club that doesn’t compete. You can sit around and talk about music and people can just get up and sing what’s on their minds and in their hearts. That’s a valid thing to do, but acting like this is a show choir and not starting practices until a week or two before a competition is too stressful on the students. We’re going to start practicing six weeks before Regionals. The arrangements need to be ready as well as the choreography. If you want the pieces to be student-choreographed, we can do that. Kurt, Mike, Brittany and I can do it. You act like Kurt isn’t a good dancer and it’s stupid. He may not be a good free-form dancer like Mike, but he’s good at blocking and positioning, and the overall look of a piece. And he’s good at doing a choreographed number. We didn’t win Nationals two years ago with a klutz as our lead Cheerio singer. So, if you feel overwhelmed by choreographing three pieces by the first week in February, Brittany and I will choreograph the girls’ piece and Mike
and Kurt can choreograph the guys’ piece. You can do the group number. But we have to pick the songs. I already had a piece picked out – ‘Stronger’.” She started to sing the chorus.

“That’s fine, Santana. I’ll work on arranging that first. How many parts?”

“Four. Three leads – me, Mercedes, and Brittany.”

He nodded.

Kurt said, “I’ll get back to you on a guys’ song, but I’m thinking Boyz2Men or The Backstreet Boys. Something that was originally sung by an all-guys group that will be able to be sung in its original key using the parts that the original performers sang. So, that leaves you to pick a group song.”

“I was serious about Berry. She thinks she’s the best and you’ve encouraged that. Enough is enough. We let her back in the first year after she quit. The second year, she sent Sunshine to an old crack house. This year, she sabotaged Kurt’s chances in the election. She will not be the sole lead on the group number. It will not be a Berry ballad with the rest of us oohing and aahing in the background. Tina and Quinn better have just as much of a featured part as Berry does if it’s female ballad.”

The warning bell for first period rang. Kurt grabbed the sign in sheet. The four students headed off to Econ together.

By the end of the week, they had mostly adjusted to their new schedule. They updated the calendars they had made, reprinted them, and hung them up. The final outcome of the Glee saga for Kurt and Sam was that they had been officially assigned to a study hall, but all they had to do was check in with Principal Beiste before working on their McKinley schoolwork in the Home Ec room since it wasn’t in use first period.

When Kurt got home from work that evening, he changed into his 221B hoodie and hurried back downstairs to eat dinner.

“What’s the rush?” Carole asked.

“Trish’s game starts at 7:30. We can’t really cheer for her when they play against McKinley and we can’t go to a Lima North sporting event like basketball. We went with the two of you to watch Sam swim, but we’re not risking having some of the guys that used to go to McKinley catch one of us there in the evening by ourselves, so we’re going to Findlay to watch her play there and it’s a half-hour drive. Sorry to eat and run.”

“It won’t be something we do again, but she did come watch me swim, so we thought it would be a nice thing to do. And Finn can’t go because he has his own game tonight. I’m figuring that’s where the two of you are headed.”

“We are,” Carole said. “But I’m going to find out when her next home game is and Burt and I can go over to Lima North for that.”

“We won’t be back tonight,” Kurt said. “We’re going to Nick’s. All of us, even Finn after he’s done playing. Jeff, Nick, Sebastian, and Dylan are meeting us in Findlay. Trish doesn’t know. It’s a surprise, but I already asked her dad. I packed some of Finn’s old pajama pants and Sam is bringing some sweats she can wear if she needs them. And he went by her house earlier and her dad gave Sam her Sherlock hoodie.”
“Sounds like fun,” Carole said.

As soon as they finished, the cleared their places, grabbed their coats, and left.

Trish looked up when a group of boys screamed and clapped when she came out onto the court. They all stood and cheered louder when she noticed them. She started laughing and waved at them.

After the game, she and a few of her teammates approached the six guys.

“Well, well, well. My own personal cheering section at an away game. That was a surprise.”

Kurt said, “The best part of the surprise is that we’re kidnapping you. So shower, grab your stuff, and meet us back here.”

“Kidnapping me to where?”

Nick said, “To my house. We’re having a sleepover.”

One of the girls said, “You’re going to a sleepover with six guys when you have a boyfriend? And you’re not inviting any of us to come with?”

Trish laughed. “They’re all gay.”

Her friend shook her head. “Only you. You find six good-looking guys and they’re all gay. How does that help us out?”

Trish rolled her eyes and ignored the question.

“Finn’s coming too,” Kurt said.

Trish said, “That one’s my boyfriend’s brother.”

“Ah. Got it. Next time bring some straight boys with you.” The girl blew them a kiss and flounced off. The other girls followed her.

The guys all laughed.

Jeff said, “Straight boys. Hmm. Nope. Doesn’t ring a bell.”

Kurt elbowed him.

Sebastian said, “Go on. Hurry up already. We have Sherlock.”

“So, that’s why you’re all wearing the hoodies?”

Sam pulled hers out of his bag. “We brought yours too. I got your dad to give it to me this afternoon.”

“Perfect.” She snatched it from him. “I’ll be right back.”

Trish hopped in the truck with Sam and Kurt. Sam headed to Nick’s house. The other four had left already to pick up the pizzas they had ordered.
“I hope we didn’t ruin some awesome plans you already had,” Sam said.

“Nope. Finn actually helped you with that. The other day, he asked me to meet him at your place after the game tonight, so I didn’t make any plans for tonight.”

Kurt said, “You’re really good. Are you hoping to play in college?”

“Yes and no. I don’t want to play college ball or in the WNBA, but I do love to play. I’m hoping to play on an intramural team. I want to be able to focus on my schoolwork. I want to be a PE teacher. A good one. Not the lame type I’ve had in school. Not everyone is athletic like I am and the PE teachers make everyone who isn’t naturally athletic hate to do any type of exercise. I want to create some fun and creative ways to get kids who don’t enjoy PE to enjoy moving their bodies and stay healthy.”

Kurt says, “Sounds great and much better than dodgeball or ‘death by ball’ for those of us who the bullies target. It’s not that I’m actually bad at throwing and aiming a ball, but when the other team uses all three balls to pelt one person one right after the other, it’s just too much, and against the rules of course, but the teachers never cared. I would have loved yoga or pilates or jazzersize or dance. Kids love to move to music.”

“I agree. So, my goal is to get into a school I can afford, do REALLY well and get offered a scholarship for graduate school at a bigger school.”

“Good plan,” Kurt said.

“What about you guys?”

“We applied to several places. We’ll just have to wait and see,” Sam said. “We don’t have any super long-term goal like graduate school.”

“Teachers don’t make much, but having a Master’s degree makes a difference. I can’t borrow a lot of money or I’ll be living with my dad for 10 years after I get out of school.”

“I can understand that,” Sam said. “We’re here.” He turned into Nick’s driveway.

The other four pulled up a couple of minutes later. By the time they had unloaded their stuff and got everything set up to eat, Finn showed up. Nick opened the door and let him in.

“You’re just in time for pizza.”

“Awesome. Where should I put my stuff?”

Nick pointed to the area next to the stairs. “I’ll hang your coat up.”

Finn handed it to him and tossed his bag down with the others and followed Nick into the kitchen. Trish got up off the stool she was sitting on and hugged Finn. “I had my own fanboys tonight. The other girls were jealous.” She kissed him chastely. “We won. How about you?”

“We won too. Are we eating? I’m starving.”

Jeff opened one of the pizza boxes and took a couple of slices out. Finn grabbed a plate, some slices, and looked around. Jeff pointed behind him. He grabbed a cup and poured himself a drink and sat down at the table. Everyone else was making their way through the line. By the time they had finished, they had eaten most of the pizzas. Nick packed up the leftover slices while Jeff set
Sherlock up. Everyone got situated and Nick turned off the last light before he sat down.

Nick put a pile of poker chips in the center of the circle they were sitting in. “So, we’re going to play Never Have I Ever, and instead of taking shots, you have to take a poker chip. In 30 minutes, the two people with the most poker chips have to either make everyone breakfast or go out and buy it and bring it back in the morning.”

Jeff said, “Never have I ever worn a kilt.”

Kurt picked up a poker chip. He was sitting next to Jeff so he went next, “Never have I never been to Europe.”

Dylan and Sebastian picked up a poker chip.

Sam said, “Never have I ever attended a private school in Ohio.”

Kurt, Dylan, Sebastian, Nick, and Jeff all took a chip.

Trish said, “Never have I ever played varsity football.”

Kurt, Sam, and Finn took a chip.

Dylan said, “Wait. Kurt played football?”

“I was the kicker for a while during my sophomore year.”

Finn said, “Never have I ever painted my nails.”

Trish and Kurt took a chip.

Dylan went next. “Never have I ever cooked an entire meal by myself.”

Kurt laughed and said, “Is that a hint that we should make sure that you don’t get the most chips?”

“How? It’s just a statement of fact. I can help or go get breakfast.”

Trish, Sam, and Kurt took a chip.

Sebastian said, “Never have I ever seen a Broadway musical.”

Sam and Kurt took a chip.

Nick said, “Never have I ever have I kissed a girl.”

Sam, Kurt, Finn, Sebastian, and Dylan took a chip.

Jeff started a second round, “Never have I ever sewn a costume.”

Kurt took a chip. It was his turn again. “How about I just end this now? I have nearly twice as many as Sam, who is in second place. How about the two of us just volunteer to cook breakfast tomorrow and we avoid a second round where people run out of g-rated questions?”

Trish said, “Works for me.”

They moved on to playing Poker.
“Sam,” Kurt said quietly. He kissed the back of his neck. “We need to wake up.”

“It’s dark.”

“I know, but we’re right by the bathroom that’s not near anyone else in the house. I want to get in the shower and…” He moved and licked the edge of Sam’s ear. “help you shower. And let you help me shower.”

Sam rolled over and faced Kurt. “Great idea.” He kissed him on the nose, got up, and grabbed their bag.

Kurt laughed silently and followed Sam into the bathroom. “You’re easily motivated,” he said quietly after they shut the door.

“You are irresistible and I want to put my hands all over you all the time and I’m certainly not turning down any opportunities to do so.” He started stripping Kurt’s pajamas off, followed by his own. “God, your gorgeous.” He kissed Kurt and turned him toward the shower. He grabbed their stuff and got in the shower with Kurt. “After that first shower with you, I never wanted to shower by myself ever again.” Sam lathered his hands and then took Kurt’s hands and did the same. He got Kurt to step a little closer.

“Well, that was the first of many amazing showers I’ve had with you. And I’m looking forward to many more.”

Sam lay on Kurt’s chest cuddled up.

“You’ve turned into my cuddle octopus.”

“Mmm. The second round before we got out of the shower made me tired and cuddly.” He slipped his hand up under Kurt’s shirt. “Need more skin-to-skin contact.” He tipped his head up. “My lips miss your lips.”

Kurt smiled at his antics and looked down and pecked Sam on the lips.

“More.” Sam pushed up a little and reconnected their lips and kissed Kurt, who quickly deepened the kiss.

They lay there kissing until they heard someone clear their throat.

Trish was leaning on the edge of the doorway and said, “While that is totally hot, most of us are up and are ready for the two of you to make breakfast while we get ready. I can see that the two of you have already showered, but got sidetracked on the way to the kitchen. Very, very hot.”

“Did you draw the short stick to have to come get us?” Kurt teased.

“Nope. I just showered first. Everyone else is showering, in pairs I might add, and Finn is asleep still.”

“I see. I’ll mention to him that he missed out on showering with you because he slept in.”

“I’d love to see how red he turns when you say that to him.”
“Got it.”

“And he wouldn’t shower with me anyway. He has some serious body image issues.”

“You can thank Santana for that, if you ever meet her. Not that I would recommend that. You’re a nice girl. She would attempt to eviscerate you. Especially since you’re dating Finn. There’s a reason why he doesn’t take you around the people from school and it’s not because he’s embarrassed of you or about the fact that you’re dating. It’s because the people we go to school with have razor tongues and he wants to protect you from that. He actually thinks you’re beautiful and he tells me more often than he needs to.”

She smiled, and then sighed. “I know he slept with Santana and regrets it.”

“She virgin-shamed him into having sex with her while standing at his locker during passing period. She actually feels bad about it now because she’s changed. No, that’s too generous. She’s changing. He’s changed a lot. He wouldn’t give in now, but she’s been ragging him about not being fit enough for three years that I know of and I would imagine that she did it the year before. He’s not chubby at all. I’ve seen him with his shirt off enough times to be certain of that. He’s not all ripped with pecs and washboard abs or huge biceps. But he’s athletic with no chubbiness anywhere. Not that having a little chubbiness would make him unattractive. It’s just the thing that Santana rips on him for. It’s made him totally self-conscious. She’s been vicious, calling him ‘man-boobs’ and amongst other insults.”

“Well, I’m going to go upstairs and do what I can to change that. That’s asinine. I think he’s super hot and I’m going to go tell him so.” She turned to go back upstairs.

Sam turned back to Kurt and pecked him on the lips. “You heard the lady. It’s time to cook.”

“Alright.” He got up off the air mattress and stood at the end waiting for Sam. He blocked him from getting past him and wrapped his arms around Sam’s neck. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“Showing me that I was worthy of being loved.” He kissed Sam. “That was me a year ago, but worse. You brought up our first shower earlier. The way you looked at me – it was the first time I didn’t hate the way I looked. Over the years, I did my best to portray confidence and a flippant attitude about what was said to me, but it was mostly an act. When you started asking to draw nudes of me, it finally started to sink in. Your constant words of affection and positive talk about me eventually worked. I don’t hate how I look anymore, and when you say things to me, the words don’t feel like flattery or lies now.”

“Good. Because I really do think you’re gorgeous. And drawing more nudes of you sounds like a good way to spend part of tomorrow. Another good use for the space heater.” Sam kissed him. “I love you.”

“I love you too. Let’s go see what we can whip up.”

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Sam and Kurt were still working on breakfast when Trish came back down. Sam was standing behind Kurt and had his arms wrapped around Kurt’s waist and was quietly singing in his ear while Kurt was working on making gravy.

“Are you two ever not adorable?”
“Um, no,” Sam said. “We’re definitely adorable all the time.”

She laughed.

“You could make some toast and butter it,” Kurt said. “Finn likes to turn his breakfast into
sandwiches.”

“Sure.” She stuck two pieces of bread in the toaster. “How many?”

“Six slices should be a good start. We made biscuits too.”

About 10 minutes later, the three of them had all of the food on the counter. Trish yelled that
breakfast was ready and five sets of feet could be heard coming down the stairs like a herd of
wildebeests running from a cheetah. They all grabbed plates and started filling them.

Jeff sat down at the table and started eating. “Much better than any restaurant.”

“Thanks,” Sam said.

Once they were all seated, Nick said, “So, the bowling alley doesn’t open until noon, but the
skating rink opens at 9:00, well, opened.”

Jeff said, “I got Kung Fu Panda 2 for Christmas. We could watch that and then go bowling or we
can go skating.”

Dylan said, “These biscuits and gravy are even better than the ones I had at the restaurant.” He
came back to the table with more on his plate.

Kurt said, “I think the movie and bowling.”

“Anyone object?” Jeff asked.

No one said anything.

“Movie and bowling it is then.”

Kurt said, “Given the amount of breakfast food we found in the fridge, I’m pretty sure that last
night’s game was rigged.”

“Oh, it definitely was, but since the four of us rigged it,” indicating himself, Jeff, Sebastian, and
Dylan, “the four of us are going to pay for you and Sam to bowl with us.”

Kurt laughed. “Fine, whatever. You know you could have just asked.”

“Yeah, but we thought maybe we’d find out some juicy information,” Jeff said.

“I don’t think there’s a whole lot of juicy information to be found out about me,” Kurt said. “The
most scandalous thing I’ve done was to drink too much cheap Chablis one morning after I got to
school, but before classes started, causing me to get sick and throw up on our guidance counselor’s
shoes in the hallway. The worst part is that she has OCD and had to go to the ER for several
decontamination showers before she could get herself put back together.”

Trish burst out laughing. “Oh, my God. That’s hysterical. It’s tragic, but hysterical. How on earth
did you have Chablis at school? When was this?”

“Sophomore year. It’s a long story to explain who April is, but she was an adult in her 30’s who
was in Glee with us at Mr. Schuester’s request. Anyway, she gave me the Chablis and told me that if I drank some every day before school it would make me more courageous. I obviously did not drink just enough to make me courageous. I drank enough to make me sick.”

Trish said, “I still can’t believe an adult gave a 16-year old alcohol at school. That’s nuts.”

“McKinley is nuts,” Sam said.

Dylan said, “Your turn, Finn. What’s your most juicy secret?”

“Um.” He stuffed another bite of food in his mouth. “I only joined Glee because I was blackmailed, but afterwards I was glad that I did. I really love performing, even if some of the people in the club aren’t all that nice.”

Kurt asked, “Who blackmailed you? And wouldn’t whatever you did that was big enough to be blackmailed about be your most juicy secret?”

“Oh, I didn’t actually do anything. Mr. Schue is the one who blackmailed me.”

Sam said, “I don’t get it.”

Finn took another bite of the bacon and egg sandwich he had made and thought. Before he took another bite, he said, “He called me into his office and he told me that he had found pot in my locker during a random locker search. He said if I would come back to Glee Club, he’d get rid of it and no one would ever know. I told him it wasn’t mine, but he said since it was in my locker, it wouldn’t matter what I said.”

“Oh, my God, Finn. We don’t have random locker checks at McKinley. And if we did, it would have been done by the police, not Mr. Schue.”

“He told me that I’d lose my football scholarship if anyone found out about it. I thought he was telling the truth. I didn’t know anything. And during that same time, more or less, Quinn told me she was pregnant and I couldn’t figure out how that had happened. I felt like I was so stupid. How could pot end up in my locker and my girlfriend that I had not had sex with be pregnant with my baby? I just thought I was too dumb to argue with anyone about any of it. I rejoined Glee and I believed Quinn.”

“You weren’t stupid, Finn. You were naïve and trusting,” Kurt said comfortingly. “That was so wrong of him – like illegal wrong. Is that why you were so upset this fall when Cooter didn’t recruit you?”

“Well, yeah. I thought Mr. Schue knew something I didn’t. You know how adults talk to each other about kids and teachers talk to each other about the students? And I know that recruiters can’t talk directly to the students for a long time, but I’m not sure when they actually can. So, when Cooter started hanging around the school this fall, I thought maybe he was sort of waiting until he could actually talk to me. It sounds totally stupid now that I think about it, but that idea had been in my head for over two years, so it all just seemed to fit.”

“I can see how it would. You trusted Mr. Schue and he violated that trust.”

“I shouldn’t have trusted him though. I mean, God, he walked past the dumpsters when Puck had lined the dweebs up for their daily dumpster toss and actually talked to me. I know he saw the line. He knew what was going to happen to all of you, but he just let it happen.”

Dylan said, “Wait, teachers saw students being lined up to be tossed into dumpsters and did
nothing?”

Kurt answered, “All the time. They saw us slushied.”

Dylan looked confused.

“That’s when someone throws a slushie in someone else’s face.”

“Those icy drinks at petrol stations?”

“That are the ones, except our school has them for sale to students. The jocks would buy them and then throw them in the losers’ faces. I know Mr. Schue saw me get shoved into the lockers hard enough to cause me to end up with fractured ribs. That’s how all of the policies got changed and how we got a new principal. I got an advocate, which is a special person who fights school districts for violations of education laws. I’m taking it that none of you told Dylan why I went to Dalton last year.”

They all shook their heads.

“My main bully was the one that knocked my into my locker hard enough to fracture my ribs. I had a broken arm at his hands the year before – 10th grade. In the fall of 11th grade, he threatened to kill me and he was expelled, but his parents appealed to the school board and he was reinstated three days later. I left and started at Dalton. I later learned about advocates. Mine went after the school district and forced them to pay my costs at Dalton since the school district broke the law and allowed the student back at McKinley. That’s why things changed. She gave the school district the choice to pay for a second year at Dalton for me and potentially other habitually bullied students or to change the policies and make McKinley safe. My attending one class per day at McKinley and the rest at OSU Lima was part of the agreement because the person who bullied me is still enrolled at McKinley.”

Dylan just looked confounded and angry. “My only school experience here has been at Dalton. I think I would like to go with you to school one day, Finn. I’m going to see if I can arrange it, if that’s okay.”

“Sure, dude.”

“I’d hate to go home and have this completely skewed view of the educational system here. I’m at Dalton because it’s the only school anywhere near Ohio State that offers the IB program and I didn’t want to lose a year of school by coming here. But now, I think I’ve not seen enough.”

“We can get it arranged at McKinley, I’m sure,” Kurt said. “You just have to let us know when. And two days would probably be best because of our new class schedule.”

“Alright. So, like a Monday and Tuesday.”

“Yes,” Finn said.

Kurt said, “Everything but one piece of bacon is gone. Someone take the last piece.”

Finn and Trish both reached for it.

“You can have it,” Finn said. He picked it up and fed it to her.

Kurt picked his plate up and went into the other room quickly. He rinsed it and put it in the dishwasher. Sam came in behind him and put his in as well.
“Why’d you leave so quickly?”

“Because he was being so cute, I couldn’t look at him without teasing him and I didn’t want to tease him. But he’s totally smitten to give up the piece of bacon.” Kurt was grinning and laughing. “I didn’t think I’d ever see him give up food.”

Sam kissed him. “Love makes people do things they wouldn’t normally do.”

“What does love make me do?”

Sam stepped in closer and spoke directly in his ear. “Dance around doing sexy dances in your underwear for me.”

Kurt blushed. “You do the same.”

“But I was Rocky. I’m shameless. You know that. I wear a Speedo in front of hundreds of people every week.” He stepped closer again. “But I would never let any of them touch me.” He kissed Kurt. “Only you.”

“Hot, still hot, but you’re bordering on making out, which as you know is prohibited in common areas. Beep, beep.” She pushed them away from the sink and dishwasher. “You cooked, we clean up. Go kiss in the living room.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Sam said using his southern drawl. He pretended to tip his imaginary hat and took Kurt’s hand, pulling him toward the living room. He switched to his Buzz Lightyear impression. “You heard the lady. Too the living room!”

She laughed at both of them.

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Kurt pulled the truck door shut. “Well, that was fun.”

“It was. Nick and Jeff are much better bowlers than I had anticipated.”

“There isn’t a lot to do in Findlay. I’m imagining they’re good skaters too.”

“What would you think if I worked as a stripper?”

“Like a stripper stripper? Like dancing around naked?”

“No. I guess an exotic dancer. Whatever it’s called. People start out wearing a regular outfit and take parts of it off as they dance, but at the end they’re still wearing a bikini or Speedos.”

“I don’t know. I would rather you dance for women so that none of the people who proposition you actually appeal to you. I’m not the type to slut-shame people. Are you actually considering it?”

“I don’t know. I hadn’t actually thought about it until this morning. I still can’t lift. I still need to make money. I know it’s January, but by June I’m going to be completely out of money. Unless I want to end up selling my truck to pay for my phone, I’m going to have to come up with something I can do.”

“I don’t think there are any exotic dancing options in Lima anyway. You’d have to search to find the closest place.”

Sam remembered something all of a sudden. “I didn’t tell you.”
“What?”

“I got the audiobook version of our Modern World History textbook. It’s a core course at OSU and they have it in audio format for vision impaired students.”

“That’s great.”

“I know you were going to read the textbook to me, but this will save your voice.”

“And it will let you work on the reading when I’m not home if you need to.”

“I just need to transfer it to an iPod or buy a portable CD player to listen to it so I can listen to it someplace besides our room.”

“You can use my old small iPod. I can always put music on it again later. I have the bigger one I can take with me if I need music offline.”

“You’re sure?”

“Yeah, of course.”

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome. You should ask about the Astronomy book.”

“I did. I’m getting that too, but it hadn’t come yesterday.”

“That’s going to make it a more manageable for you to be able to get your work done.”

“It will. And the best part is that I didn’t have to pay for them since I could prove I had copies of the books.”

“Excellent. You can transfer the files when we get home. I have work to do for my French class.”

“Maybe you can do it in the buff, and I can get started on my drawing.”

“Sure. I’m stopping by the library because the *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* audiobook is in.”

“Awesome. That’s what we’re doing tomorrow.”

Kurt and Sam sat down 10 minutes before first period, as requested. Mr. Schue came sliding into the room. “Finn, give me a drum roll.” He hurried to the white board and wrote, “Marry me?” and said, “Yes, I am proposing to Miss Pillsbury.”

They all clapped and cheered.

“This is the kind of news you share with your family and you guys are my family.”

Mike said, “Mr. Schue, we’re so happy for you.”

“We totally don’t think you’ll screw it up this time,” Quinn added.

“Here’s the thing. It’s gotta be perfect. This proposal needs to knock her well-washed socks off.” He pulled a chair out and sat down in it backwards. “So, that’s your assignment for the week.
Come up with a proposal number. You know Miss Pillsbury. It’s gotta be perfect.”

Artie had a huge smile on his face and said, “You can count on us, Mr. Schue.”

The next morning, they heard about the proposal idea that Artie had come up with from Finn before the bell ran for Econ.

“We met before school this morning to work on it. It sucks that you two aren’t here at lunch to do it with us.”

Sam said, “Well, you can record it or tell us about it later.”

Rachel regaled the two of them with the idea that she Tina, Mercedes, and Santana were going to do.

Kurt said, “Ooh, I like that. The four of you will sound amazing together, if you and Santana can keep from killing each other.”

“We’re fine. This is about being professional. I’m sure I will have to perform with people equally dislikable at some point. It’s good practice.”

Kurt nodded.

The bell rang and she went back to her seat.

“I have my own idea,” Sam said quietly.

Kurt raised an eyebrow and reached under the desk and took Sam’s hand.

The Glee Club minus the previous Troubletones members, except Sugar were sitting on the bleachers in the pool area Friday morning before school. Sam had the synchronized swimming team show them their routine to “We Found Love” by Rihanna.

When they finished, he said, “We can add parts for ourselves and sing the song rather than perform it to the recording.”

Santana stood up. “I think this is the most ridiculous and utterly unique idea ever.”

Mr. Schue asked, “So, does that mean yes?”

She looked at Kurt, who just winked at her. “Yes. It means yes. But there better already be suits somewhere because we don’t have the time or money to buy a bunch of swimming suits for this.”

“Not to fear,” Kurt said. “I found some suits online for a very reasonable price. I just need to know who exactly will be participating and Tina will be measuring people, so line up. They need to be ordered today,”

After Econ, Kurt and Sam left the building, as usual. Kurt had left two Thermoses of coffee in the Navigator to drink on the way to class.
“Mmm. Hot is good.” He turned the heat up. “I’m so cold. Your idea is super cool for the proposal, but it’s freezing. Who decided that swimming was a winter sport?”

“It’s an indoor sport, so it doesn’t matter when the competitions are,” Sam teased back. “The coffee is good though. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.”

“I liked your proposal better. I wouldn’t have wanted a bunch of people there.”

“The only reason I’m in favor of this proposal is because they already live together. I would never be in favor of a big spectacle like that if both people weren’t already committed and invested in the relationship being a long-term commitment. I’ve seen some of those spectacles in videos and I just feel so bad for the person being surprised. We had already been talking long-term and I still didn’t want to put you on the spot in front of other people. I wanted it to be private.”

“Well, I loved it. And I love you.” He took another drink. “I’m ready for spring and it’s not even two weeks into January yet. Ugh!”

“I love you too. We’ll snuggle tonight. We can wrap up together and study.”

“Sounds much better than just studying.”


Friday morning before school, Mr. Schue led Miss Pillsbury to the school pool. Several early arrivers to school that morning were asked to hold white roses and give them to her as they made their way to the pool. As they entered, the music started and the New Directions sang.

Yellow diamonds in the light
An we’re standing side by side
As your shadow crosses mine
What it takes to come alive
It’s he way I’m feeling I just can’t deny
But I’ve got to let it go

We found love in a hopeless place…

Rachel and Santana split the lead seamlessly. Everyone had fun and the best part was that Miss Pillsbury loved it and said “yes”.

That evening after their basketball games, Trish and Finn were in the dining room with Kurt and Sam. Kurt had made them a late dinner and pulled it out. He and Sam hadn’t eaten dinner so they could eat with them. About the time they all were seated, the doorbell rang.

Sam got up to answer it since he was the closest and Burt and Carole weren’t home. He turned the front lights on and looked through the peephole, but didn’t see anyone at first. Rachel took a step back. Sam opened the door and let her in. “Rachel. Come on in.” He closed the door and reset the alarm. “Is Kurt here?”

“Yes.”

She heard Kurt and Finn’s voices in the dining room and stepped to her right and walked into the
room. She was surprised to see a third person that she didn’t recognize.

Kurt saw her first. “Rachel. What are you doing here so late?”

“Oh, well I went to the game thinking that you might be there watching Finn, but you weren’t there. So, I asked my dads if I could come over here. Can I talk to you?”


Sam sat back down at the table. Kurt walked to the end of the room and Rachel followed him into the living room. He continued to walk through the room, down the hall, and into Burt’s office like he had been asked to do. He closed the door behind him. They both sat down.

“Did you get your NYADA letter?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“So what did yours say?”

“I’m a finalist. How about you?”

“Yes. I was surprised after what happened in the fall. Principal Beiste added an addendum to my transcript highlighting my suspension.”

“We have six weeks to prepare for the live audition.”

“I’ve already decided on ‘Don’t Rain on My Parade’. Have you chosen your piece?”

“I haven’t.”

“May I ask who was in the dining room? Is that one of Finn’s cousins?”

“No. She’s his girlfriend.”

“Oh.” Her voice hitched when she tried to speak. “I didn’t know he was seeing anyone.”

“He is.”

“How long?”

“They met in the fall and spent some time getting to know each other and they’ve been dating for about two months seriously.”

“I see.”

“You know he’s not allowed to date you.”

“I know. I just – I still love him. I had … hoped that we might still be able to work things out after graduation once I wasn’t banned from dating anymore.” Tears streamed down her cheeks.

“Rachel, I’m not sure what to say. Did you go back to the counselor that was helping you last year?”

“No. I thought I could handle things on my own.”

“You’re younger most everyone in the club except maybe Sugar and Rory. I know you like to think that you’re mature and grown up. But age-wise, you’re where I was a few weeks after the end of
our sophomore year. I’m a year and a half older than you. I’ve learned a lot of things in the last year and a half. If the therapist was helpful, go back to her. Help yourself while you have the chance to. Finn isn’t on the same path you’re on. We talked about this ages ago. He’s not going to change into someone who wants to live in New York City. You need to let go and move on.”

“You do know that you sound like the pot calling the kettle black. Sam doesn’t seem anymore interested in big city life than Finn. But you don’t seem to think that it’s a problem. On the other hand, Blaine is quite the catch AND he wants to live in New York City and perform. Sam’s a nice guy like Finn, but Blaine is a lot more of a match for you. He’s charming, he’s smart, he reads Vogue, he fashionable, and he’s sophisticated. He got his NYADA finalist letter as well. All three of us can find a place to share. It will be so much fun.”

“When I go to New York, Sam and I will be going together. I’m not sure why you still think that Blaine is right for me. I have to wonder if you still have a crush on him. Whatever your reasons, they’re yours and not mine. I love Sam and I don’t have any unrequited feelings for Blaine. I actually have no feelings for Blaine at all. He’s someone in Glee Club with me, like Mike. He and I aren’t friends, but we aren’t unfriendly.”

“I just don’t see how you and Sam have a future. He’s not driven like we are. He’s not reaching for the stars. He won’t ever be your equal.”

Kurt took a deep breath and willed himself to stay calm. “Not everyone is driven to succeed at something public. His worth as my partner isn’t based on whether some day he will be equally as famous as I am. Julia Roberts has been married to a man who isn’t a performer for going on 10 years. Not every famous or successful person has a partner who is equally well-known.”

“I guess you’re right, but …”

“But nothing, Rachel. I love Sam and he loves me. And I’m grateful for that every day. Your own version of Mr. Right could be finishing up high school in Idaho right now with his heart is set on the city that doesn’t sleep. He might be a junior in high school and you might not meet him for a year and a half. You might not meet until you’re 25. You can’t put your happiness on someone else’s shoulders. Two halves of an orange make a whole orange, but to have a real relationship, both people have to be whole and content with who they are. You have to find that contentment on your own. Finn spent six months figuring who he is and what he wants. He’s content now. Don’t try to take that from him by singing to him again and making him feel uncomfortable like you did last week, which you did under the guise of it being a suggestion for the proposal song.”

“Does he love her?”

“I don’t know. What I do know is that they’re good together. They laugh. They enjoy a lot of the same things. There’s a comfortable ease between the two of them. He’s not on edge around her like he’s waiting to be told what he did wrong. They’re relaxed around each other.”

She nodded and stood up. “I won’t keep you. You were getting ready to eat.”

“I’m glad you got a finalist letter. You’re an extremely talented singer, Rachel. I’ll walk you out.”

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Kurt sat back down at the table and ate what was on his plate. Everyone else had finished except Finn who was finishing up seconds or thirds.

Sam asked, “What did she want?”
“To know if I had gotten my NYADA letter and whether I am a finalist. She got hers and she’s a finalist. She wanted to share her excitement with someone.”

Sam said to Finn, “Why don’t you two go down and set it up and we’ll be right down after Kurt finishes. I’ll clean up.”

“Sure,” Finn said.

After he and Trish were downstairs, Sam said, “She didn’t seem excited.”

“She was until she saw Trish here. She thought maybe she was Finn’s cousin. I told her the truth—that she’s Finn’s girlfriend. She cried. She’s still hung up on him. She was holding out hope that she could convince him to get back together after we graduate.”

“Oooh. Not a fun position for you to be put in.”

“Not at all. I didn’t give her any information about Trish, except she did ask how long they had been together and I answered.” Kurt got up and gathered dishes up.

Sam started to help him. They packed up the leftovers, and started the dishwasher. He pulled Kurt into a hug, and then switched to a slow dance position, mostly just holding him close and swaying in place.

“I love you. I know you feel drawn to help her, but she’s got to work this out.”

“She thinks I’ll come around and we’ll be friends if we both get into NYADA. It’s like this last bit of hope she seems to have and I feel like a really mean person not telling her that I’m not going to go to NYADA. I’m surprised I even got a finalist letter with how weak my application was, considering how prestigious it’s supposed to be.”

“Why are you going through with it?”

“ Mostly just for the experience of it. My other applications required video auditions and this one is live. I just want to see how I hold up, to stretch myself, and see if I can do it. Performing live on an empty stage in front of a single person or a few people is how auditioning for roles will be. It’s not at all like performing a solo with a group of people standing on the stage behind you and a full audience. I did it that once last summer and it was a lot more nerve-wracking than I had expected it to be. I just want to see if I can do it.”

“Good reason. Let’s get downstairs and watch the last *Sherlock* episode. I’m bummed that the other guys couldn’t come.”

“Me too. Let’s go watch.”

Tuesday after Econ, Kurt and Sam waited outside the door while Mercedes and Santana tried to work their charm on Mr. Sanchez. They came out less than five minutes later.

Mercedes had big smile on her face. “He agreed. We can do it.”

“Alright then. We’ll have our outfits and we’ll be ready to sing Michael. We’ll be here at 7:30. We still have to leave by 10:00 in clothes we can wear to class.”

“Got it,” she said.
Sam asked, “What did you two offer?”

Santana said, “Video proof that we were doing what we said we were. He’s a big Michael fan.”

Kurt laughed. “Well that was easy then. We have to go. See you tomorrow.”

Before they made it out of the building, Blaine intercepted them. “Rachel told me that you got your finalist letter. Maybe the three of us can get together and perform for each other and give pointers to improve our performances.”

“I’m not sure. How are you graduating this year? You should be a junior.”

“Well, like a lot of students in private school, I took a few high school classes in 8th grade. English and Algebra. And sophomores take US History at Dalton so that they can take AP history courses during junior and senior year. So, this summer when I was with Rachel we were talking about school and she talked about how McKinley had changed, which made me think that being here wouldn’t be as bad now. And when I went to see the Warblers back in September, Nick and Jeff said they were graduating early and it made me wonder, so I looked up the actual graduation requirements for the state of Ohio and found that Dalton had more requirements than the state. All I needed was to take seven classes each semester. English, Pre-calc, Physics, Government and Econ and three electives. I’ll have exactly 42 credits. After I decided to pursue performing, I realized that I didn’t need two years of AP classes to get into a performing arts program like I would if I wanted to get into a pre-med or pre-law program.”

“I see. We have classes off-campus after first period, which is where we’re headed now. And I work every day until 6:00. After that, I have a lot of homework. We’re both actually full-time students at OSU Lima, but in order to be in the Dual Enrollment program we have to be here for one period a day.”

“Oh. Well, if you have time maybe we can work out getting together a few times closer to the actual live audition dates.”

“Maybe. We’ll have to see. We’ve gotta run.”

“Sure.”

Kurt and Sam continued the way they were headed.

Once they were in the truck, Sam asked, “What was that about?”

“Rachel told me that he had applied to NYADA and gotten a finalist letter as well. She pointed out that Blaine is a better match for me.” He took a deep breath. “Let me back up. I told her that she needed to let Finn go and find contentment on her own because Finn wasn’t ever going to be a big city guy. She countered with her belief that you and Finn have that in common. She implied that I am doing the same thing she did, and still wants to do. I’m dating a cute small town guy, who’s not going anywhere in the direction of New York City.”

“Oh, wow. You’re not seriously considering that I wouldn’t go to New York with you are you?”

“She has a way of getting under my skin. I know you love me and you’ll go with me, but I don’t want to ask you to do something you’ll hate.”

“I’m not going to hate it. We had fun when we were there last May. We can’t afford to live right
down in the heart of all of the congestion and crowds anyway, not unless one of us wins one of those big lottery jackpots. There are green spaces. I think we’ll both be happier if we find a place to live with a park nearby or that is on a bus route or subway ride to get to one. You may enjoy the bright lights of performing, but we both know that you’re an introvert that needs time to recharge away from the hustle and bustle of a lot of people.”

“You’re sure?”

“I’m sure I’m sure. She really got to you, didn’t she?”

“She’s an expert at it. She has this steadfastness and sincerity in the way she speaks that makes it difficult to remember that I have no obligation to agree with her.”

“You call it steadfastness and sincerity, but to me it always feels like she’s condescending and patronizing.”

“She probably is to you. That’s the way she talks to Finn and she obviously thinks the two of you are a lot alike.”

Sam pulled into a parking space. “We need to move. Talking to everyone after class has us running late.”

“Not so late as to make me give up my kiss?”

“Definitely not.” He faced Kurt and they kissed before they got out.

Kurt showed up in his outfit, but most of the others had to change once they got to the auditorium. Kurt, Blaine, Santana, Brittany, and Mercedes started in the hallway, and made their way through the library singing “Wanna Be Startin’ Somethin’”, collecting Quinn, Tina, and Rachel on their way. Once they got there the rest of the group joined them on the stage.

They had decided to pair up in ways that they hadn’t before or sing a solo. Artie and Mike went next with an amazing rendition of “Scream”. Quinn went next and sang “Never Can Say Goodbye”. When she finished, she told everyone that she had gotten her early admission letter to Yale. Everyone congratulated her. Finn and Mercedes sang “Human Nature”. Sam and Kurt sang “I Just Can’t Stop Loving You”. Rory got Sugar, Brittany, and Santana to dance with him while he sang “PYT”. Puck sang “The Way You Make Me Feel”.

About that time, the Warblers led by Sebastian made their entrance.

Rachel flipped out. “What are THEY doing here?”

Kurt stepped forward. “I invited them. The heat went out at Dalton during the night and the school asked anyone who could go home to leave so that they could move the remaining students to the gym which has a separate heating system. I thought it would be fun. I know they’re our competitors, but they’re also my friends. And them singing Michael songs with us or for us will not help them beat us at Regionals.”

“Fine. Let’s have a sing off.” She ushered all of the New Directions to one side of the stage and motioned for the Warblers to come up on the stage. “Let’s do ‘Bad’.”

Sebastian smiled. Kurt had warned him. They practiced a few songs on the way over to learn the words. “Bad” happened to be one of them. “A cappella style,” he said.
They divided up in half and faced off in a mock street fight singing “Bad” with Santana and Artie leading the New Directions in attitude and vocally. The Warblers started off the beat boxing and the back up parts.

They postured and mock fought around the stage with all the serious demeanor of a real street fight. Once the song ended, they broke the seriousness and laughed.

“Alright, Kurt. You win,” Sebastian said. “They are fun. We have one for you.”

The Warblers repositioned themselves. They began with oohs and the beat boxing. Sebastian came in and sang lead on “I Want You Back” and totally flirted with Kurt the whole time. Kurt rolled his eyes and acted like he wasn’t the least bit interested. Sebastian danced over to him, pushed Sam to the side, and pulled him close and then danced his way back toward the group. By the time they finished, Santana was laughing and the rest the New Directions were totally confused.

Kurt flounced over to Sebastian and said, “Oh, honey, you know I’m yours, and threw his arms around Sebastian’s neck and hugged him tight.”

Sebastian wasn’t quite expecting it, but went with it quickly and wrapped his arms around Kurt’s waist. He pretended to kiss Kurt on the neck. He whispered, “Your friends are freaking out.”

Kurt let him go. “Before you all have a cow, this is one of my best friends, Sebastian. Our moms were best friends and we grew up together. And it was all in fun just to add to the mock drama of a face off. So, introductions. Kurt named each of the New Directions.

Sebastian did the same. “So, what are you singing for us?”

“Well, we have a couple. We’ll start with a reprise of something I didn’t get to participate in last year.”

The Warblers moved and sat down along the front edge of the stage. The New Directions got in place and sang “Thriller”.

The Warblers all clapped when they finished. Sebastian stood up. “I have a couple of instrumentalists for this next piece. They need cellos to play. They brought their own bows.”

Two of the musicians left and brought back two cellos. They tuned them quickly.

“Santana, if you will.”

The New Directions sat down on the risers facing the Warblers. Santana took her place standing opposite Sebastian. The music started and they sang “Smooth Criminal”.

Both groups were shocked into silence and then finally came to when Santana said, “I was better.” And everyone started clapping.

He stepped close enough so that only she could hear him, “If you weren’t a girl…”

“I’d do you even though you are a guy. Let me know if you change your mind. I could rock your world.”

He laughed and blew her a kiss as he walked back to where the Warblers were sitting.

“Alright,” Kurt said. “We have one more.”

The New Directions got the Warblers to stand up and face them. They started to sing “Black and
White”. By the end all of them were singing together. When they finished the girls offered the Warblers hugs and most of the guys shook hands. Of course, Jeff grabbed Kurt and pulled him into bear hug and spun him around.

Kurt got everyone’s attention. “Anyone who wants to adopt a Warbler for the rest of the school day can do that. They’re here with Miss Pillsbury’s approval. We need for all of them to be adopted and taken to classes for the rest of the day. Group up by grade level. We’ll see what we can do. There are no freshmen New Directions though.”

About 10 minutes later, everyone had taken at least one Warbler.

“At the end of the day, Sam will meet everyone by Miss Pillsbury’s office to get the Warblers signed out properly.”

Everyone nodded. Kurt and Sam went to change and came back. It looked like Santana had it under control. She had taken Sebastian and Dylan as her own. Kurt shook his head and laughed. He saw Brittany flitting around Trent. Finn took Jeff and Nick. He and Sam waved as they took off to go to their classes.

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Sam went back to the school at the end of the day. Burt and Carole were out of town, so none of them could actually stay at the Hummel’s except Dylan and Sebastian. Most of them were headed to Nick’s and Jeff’s houses in Findlay. A few were headed other places within an hour’s drive.

Once everyone had gone their separate ways, it was just Sam, Sebastian, and Dylan left.

Sebastian asked Sam. “Why don’t we hang out with Santana and Brittany anymore?”

“Finn. He and Santana don’t have a good … anything. She mocked him for years, virgin-shamed him into sleeping with her, and then went after him again in the hall last fall. You remember her getting outed. That’s because for once, he stood up for himself and smarted back to her, but unfortunately it was in the hall and he was overheard. She’s better, but she lost her grandma over that. I mean like her grandma acts like she died. Won’t talk to her, nothing.”

“Wow. I do remember the outing and Finn getting grounded. I just never put all of it together that it had been an ongoing thing with the two of them. And virgin-shaming someone? What does that even mean?”

“It means that she hassled him about how disgusting it was for someone to be a virgin at his age, which at the time was 16.”

“Oh, wow.”

“Santana wields her sexual magnetism like a weapon. So, getting her and Finn in the same room in a social setting isn’t very likely. Plus, if she saw Trish, she’d tear her down so fast. The mean names would flow like a waterfall. Jolly green giant, skyscraper, Amazonian, Xena, or whatever other insulting things she could think of based on Trish’s height and athletic build. She always yells about how she grew up in Lima Heights, which is the run down area of town, but her dad’s a doctor. Maybe her grandma lives in Lima Heights? She’s impossible to figure out because she’s been on a ‘Kurt is cool.’ kick for about a year now with no reason as to why. Kurt just takes in stride and runs with it, knowing that any day he could show up to school and she could be back to calling him Twinkletoes amongst other equally effeminate names she has called him previously.”

“I wouldn’t have guessed.”
“If you two want to go out and do things with them, we can. We just can’t include Finn and Trish. Always keep in mind that anything Santana knows about you, she feels completely free to use against you in anyway she feels necessary at any point in time.”

“Right. Well, she invited us to the game tonight, so we thought we’d go, and then go out with her and Brittany afterwards.”

“That’s fine. You can just come back to the house whenever you’re done.”

Trent pulled into the parking lot of Hummel Tires and Lube with a large coffee the way Kurt liked his in the afternoons. He went inside and asked for Kurt. A couple of minutes later, Kurt came in from the working bay area.

“Trent! What a surprise.”

Trent handed him the coffee.

Kurt’s face lit up. “And you’ve brought me a gift. Thank you. Do you need an oil change?”

“Do you have time for one?”

“Actually I do.”

“Well, then certainly. I’m supposed to get one done February 1st. I’m sure my dad won’t mind if it’s a few days early.”

“Well, just fill the top part of this out and give me your key and I’ll move your car into one of the bays. Once you’re done, just wait and I’ll come get you.” A few minutes later, Kurt was back and ushered Trent out into the work area. “Right this way, Sir. If you can stay seated on this stool, I can let you stay with me. Don’t touch anything.”

“I can do that.”

Kurt opened the hood of Trent’s car and got started. “So, why are you really here?”

“I wanted to thank you.”

“For what?”

“Just being yourself and showing me that being unique is okay.”

“Oh. Alright. We’ll you’re welcome.”

“I got up the nerve to tell my dad at Christmas.”

“Really?”

“No. I didn’t tell him THAT. I told him that I want to be a conductor, not a doctor. I figured the worst he could say is ‘no’ and guilt trip me into doing what he wants. He didn’t say anything at first. And then, he asked me why. Before I went home, I asked four of the guys in the orchestra to learn a piece that I had composed for a string quartet. They agreed. I conducted them and I recorded it. I played him the recording when he asked me why. It confused him at first.”

Kurt continued to work on Trent’s car while he talked. “Umm hmm.”
“I told him that I had composed and conducted the piece. He had me play it again and turn it up a little. He closed his eyes and listened.” Trent’s voice began to waver a bit under the emotion. “He liked it. He told me that he had read studies on how music helped heal people’s minds and could raise their spirits enough to give them the perseverance to try hard enough to recover. He said that if I can write beautiful music then I can heal in ways that doctors can’t. He’s going to let me study music.”

Kurt put his tools down. “Trent, that’s amazing! I’d hug you, but I’d ruin your blazer. I’m so glad for you.”

“Me too. I didn’t tell him the other thing. I’m still too afraid of how he would react. I’m going to wait until I finish college. I know it’s a long time, but I already risked a lot. Maybe in two years I’ll feel different. But for now, I’m researching music schools that specialize in conducting and classical composition.”

“I’m really glad for you. I can only imagine the weight lifted from your shoulders.”

“I feel so much more at ease.”

“So, are you heading to Nick’s or Jeff’s or home for the weekend?”

“To Nick’s.”

“Sam and I are going to try to get as much schoolwork done as we can tonight so that we can drive over tomorrow and do whatever everyone’s going to do. Bowling, skating, playing games, going to the movies or whatever.”

“I heard Sam say that you were at work and that you two would be coming over tomorrow and not tonight. I wanted to tell you in person, so I came by here just in case you ended up changing your mind about tomorrow.”

“Well, I’m glad you did. I’ve got a few more things to do, and then you’ll be set.”

“I’ll just sit and watch.”
Chapter 29

Kurt kissed Sam’s neck.

“Mmf.”

He kissed him again.

“S’dark.”

“Not completely.”

“S’too dark.”

He moved and straddled Sam while kneeling. He leaned forward and kissed his neck again and trailed the kisses down to his chest and back up the other side until he reached his ear. “Too dark to make out?”

“Never.”

“I hope not.” He licked the edge of Sam’s earlobe and ever so lightly blew on it,

“Oh, God. Don’t stop. Lie down on me.”

Kurt left the rinsed rag on the edge of the tub and got back in bed with Sam. Sam rolled over and curled up on him as soon he was under the covers.

“What time is it?”

“7:30. It should be getting light out soon, but we still have time for more kissing and a shower before we leave.”

“Why are we leaving so early? I thought we were meeting for lunch, and then going bowling.”

“We are, but I’m taking you some place first.”

“Mmm. A surprise from my gorgeous boyfriend. I like that.”

“Even when I wake you up when it’s dark out on a weekend?”

“Even then.” He started humming “Lucky”. “I feel like the luckiest guy. You’re the sweetest boyfriend and you always manage to find fun ways to surprise me, like waking me up with your wily sexy ways.”

“Well, you are certainly quite sexy yourself. And you're fun to surprise. And I love you so much.”

“I love you too.” Sam moved and kissed Kurt. “Are you ready to go again?”

“Oh, yeah. This time, you lie on me.”
“How did we miss reading about this before? This is awesome.”

“I don’t know,” Kurt said. “Obviously I typed something slightly different in when I searched for things to do. I had no idea that the Mazza Museum existed until a few days ago. And since we agreed to meet up with most of the Warblers later today, I thought we should come look since we were already planning on driving here.”

“Well, who would have thought that a small place in Findlay would have the largest collection of book illustrations? Definitely not me, but it is really cool.”

Sebastian said, “I’m not even an artist, but this is cool.”

“I’m going to tell my dad about this place, in case he hasn’t already been here. He’s not an illustrator, but he’d still like to see this place I think. Before we leave in June, we’re going to go to several large cities to view their art collections. We’re going to Buffalo for the art and to see Niagara Falls, and then Pittsburgh. After that, we’re coming back and packing up. Then we’re going to rent a car and drive to Louisville, Indianapolis, and then on to Chicago for a few days before we fly out.”

“That sounds cool,” Sam said.

“It does,” Kurt agreed. *Four months. Four months, and then Bas leaves again.* He walked toward another group of illustrations, attempting to gain control over his emotions before anyone noticed.

Sam wasn’t fooled. He walked up behind Kurt and gently put his hand on Kurt’s waist. He didn’t need to say anything. His touch conveyed everything he felt.

Kurt nodded slightly. “These are really pretty.” He moved his hand up his side and put it over the top of Sam’s.

“And cheerful.”

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Kurt surveyed the group as the four of them walked in. He asked Sebastian, “How did Brittany and Santana get invited to go bowling?”

He laughed. “They invited themselves.”

“Sounds about right.”

The hilarity of watching a group of uppity prep school boys give up and have the bumpers put up after their first turn caused Kurt to struggle to keep a straight face. Santana didn’t even bother trying. Brittany was completely confused by the fact that a group of teen guys had exactly no idea of how to bowl.

“Didn’t their parents teach them when they were little?” Kurt heard her ask Santana, not so quietly.

“No, sweetie. I think they taught them how to iron their $100 bills.”

“If they just ask for nice unwrinkled ones at the bank, they wouldn’t have to iron them.”

After two rounds, they headed for the lounge area with the snack bar. They had a karaoke machine, which Brittany spotted right away.

“Sing for me Santana, please?” she begged.
“The things I do for you.” She walked over to see her options. She pressed one. The music started and Santana sang for all she was worth.

I got a pocket, got a pocketful of sunshine.
I got a love, and I know that it’s all mine.
Oh, oh woah.

Do what you want, but you’re never going to break me.
Sticks and stones are never gonna shake me.
No, oh woah.

Brittany clapped the loudest when she finished. Santana sat back down with her.

“That was perfect.”

Santana genuinely smiled and her eyes lit up from Brittany’s praise.

Nick and Jeff got up. After they were brave enough to go first, several other guys got up and sang, including Blaine, who had shown up as well, singing “Last Friday Night”.

Brittany whispered in Santana’s ear. She grabbed Kurt by the wrist and dragged him up to the stage with them. He watched what she chose. He rolled his eyes and shook his head. Santana looked at Brittany. Kurt sighed and got in the middle, and the two girls took their places.

All the single ladies
All the single ladies
Now put your hands up
Up in the club
Just broke up
Doin’ my own little thing…

The three of them sang and did the whole dance. Sam cheered and wolf whistled at Kurt. When they finished, Brittany hugged Kurt and kissed him on the cheek.

When he came down of the platform, Sam met him halfway and hugged him. He spoke directly into Kurt’s ear. “You are so hot. Those hips.”

“Are all yours. Let’s sit back down.”

“Nope. This time you’re singing with me.”

Kurt followed him back up to the stage. Sam whispered in his ear. Kurt laughed. Sam chose the song. When it started, Sam sang Waylon Jennings’ part and Kurt sang Willie Nelson’s part.

Mommas don’t let your babies grow up to be cowboys.
Don’t let them pick guitars or drive them old trucks.
Let ’em be doctors and lawyers and such.

Mommas don’t let your babies grow up to be cowboys.
‘Cause they’ll never stay home and they’re always alone, even with someone they love.

Everybody got into it and was clapping and laughing. Santana motioned for them to come sit by her when they came down off the stage.

While some of the Warblers were looking through the song list, Santana spoke quietly to Kurt,
“So, Britt thinks the two of you are engaged because you’re wearing matching rings. I hadn’t noticed because the two of you sit at the back of Econ and in Glee.”

Kurt leaned up and winked at Brittany.

“Told you!” Brittany said, bouncing in her seat.

“Deets! I needs deets, now!”

Sam leaned behind Kurt. “He asked me not quite two months ago.”

“And your dad knows?”

“Sure,” Kurt said. “We told him and Carole the next day.”

“Who all knows?”

Sam said, “Um. Nick, Jeff, Sebastian, Dylan, Finn, Burt, Carole, and my family. And now, the two of you.”

“So, you’re keeping it a secret?”

“Nope. Just not broadcasting it for everyone and their brother to feel the need give us opinions that don’t matter to us. If people notice and are happy for us, they’ll say so. Hopefully, everyone else will just keep quiet.”

Brittany asked. “When?”

Kurt answered, “Not for a while. It’s not legal here. If it’s not by the time we graduate from college, we’ll go to Washington, D.C. or New York and get married there.”

She smiled. “Congratulations!”

“Thanks, Britt.”

Kurt pulled his phone out to check the time. “We’ve got to get going. We’ve got schoolwork left to do.”

“No rest for the brilliant,” Santana said.

“Something like that,” Kurt replied. “We added Modern World History to our classes when Glee wasn’t for credit anymore. So, we went from Glee work to a ton of reading and writing papers.”

“Fun, fun,” she said.

“Did you apply to go to college anywhere?”

She nodded.

Kurt spoke where only Santana could hear. “What about Britt?”

“She’s applied to dance schools, not colleges. She doesn’t want to do any more schoolwork. She wants to open a dance school.”

“Sounds perfect,” Kurt said. “What do you want to study?”

“Business, specifically marketing or publicity.”
“Well, you’ve always known how to get people’s attention.”

“That I have.” She winked at him.

He stood up when the next song ended. Sam followed his lead.

“We’ve got to get going. We’ve got a bunch of schoolwork to do. Thanks for letting us join in the fun. It was good to see everyone. I hope they get your heat back on soon.”

Jeff got up and hugged him.

They waved as they left the lounge area.

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Kurt did some Astronomy reading while Sam listened to the reading and followed along in their Modern History textbook. They switched textbooks, and when they finished, they took a dinner break. They went downstairs and warmed up a variety of leftovers and ate a hodgepodge of things. They loaded all the storage bowls and lids in the dishwasher and turned it on.

“What do you have left?”

“Some French reading and that chapter we were assigned in English.”

Alright. I did the English already. I’ll do our laundry while you do the other stuff you need to do. Then we can go downstairs and play Mario Kart.”

“Good plan.”

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Kurt’s phone pinged. He waited until they crossed the finished line to pick it up. He called Finn back. “We’re downstairs.”

A couple of minutes later, Finn and Trish came down the stairs.

Finn said, “We brought you some tacos.”

“Thanks,” Sam said.

“Is Kurt completely annihilating you?”

“Nope,” Sam said. “I’ve won a few races. Wanna play teams? Which one of you is better?”

“Trish,” Finn admitted.

“Then she’s my partner. Kurt’s yours. That will make it more even. Did you already eat? There’s a lot of tacos in this bag.”

“Oh, no, we didn’t eat yet. Some of them are for us. I’ll get some drinks,” Finn said. He came back with drinks and napkins. “They’re all the same. It was easier. There’s hot sauce in there too.”

“Good deal. Thanks for thinking of us. We cleaned out the leftovers, but it was a light dinner.”

Once they finished eating, they rearranged and started over with teams.

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Sunday afternoon when Carole came back from the airport, she took Finn into Burt’s office.

“What’s up?”

“Well, I got a call Friday from Miss Pillsbury saying that she had seen you speaking to a recruiter at lunch.”

“Yeah. I did.”

“You didn’t sign any papers, did you?”

“No. I just took one of the brochures. It’s upstairs in my backpack.”

“Are you considering enlisting?”

“I was looking at the information about the Reserves. I don’t really want to enlist, but the Reserves seemed pretty cool. You go to Basic, and then you only go once a month for training. You get paid and they pay for college. It seemed like a decent option. I know you and Burt don’t have a lot of money to send both of us to college at the same time.”

“Finn, there’s something I need to tell you. And you’re not going to like it, but I need you to listen carefully. I know you’re going to feel like I’ve lied to you about something, but please, please listen and don’t leave until we’ve covered all of your questions.”

“This sounds bad.”

“So, you know that your dad fought in Desert Storm.”

“Right.”

“Do you know when Desert Storm took place?”

“In the 90’s.”

“Specifically, it took place from mid-January to the end of February in 1991.”

“I wasn’t born until 1993.”

“That’s right. This is where you have to listen carefully. Your dad thought the same thing you did. His parents didn’t have the money for him to go to college. He joined the Marines. He was back from his three years active enlistment when we met at Ohio State in June. I was 19. He was 21. That was in 1990. He started school that fall. We fell in love. We got married over winter break. He was Active Reserves at the time. He went one weekend a month for training. When Desert Storm was being planned, barely two weeks later, his group was called back to active duty. They were shipped off to Iraq. In the eight weeks he was gone, something happened. We’ll never know what because he wouldn’t tell me. He came home different. I still loved him and he loved me, but he had PSTD. He went to therapy. It seemed to help. He went back to school that summer to make up for missing the spring semester.”

“Okay.”

“He continued on with his schooling and the therapy that year. I was in nursing school and graduated that following May in 1992 because I went during the summers to be able to finish more quickly. His third year started in the fall of 1992, and he wanted to have a baby. I wanted to wait a couple of years until he finished school, but he was sure that we could make it work – that I could
arrange my shifts to work evenings and we would be fine. I had you that next summer. We were both so excited. He loved you to pieces. He only had one year of college left. I had been working evenings and it was working fine. He thought he was recovered. He quit going to therapy.”

“He wasn’t recovered.”

“He seemed to be, but a few months after you were born, he started using marijuana. I didn’t have any proof other than a faint odor at times. But I pretended that my job changed and I had been moved to days with no evening option anymore, and I started taking you to Lori’s house during the daytime while he was going to school. By spring break, he’d disappear for a few hours at a time, and then a day at a time. He’d tell me that he just needed to clear his head. But he’d come back fine.”

“Oh, God no.” He started to cry.

Carole was crying too. “Finn, honey. He loved us so much, but he broke. Whatever happened broke him. That’s why I said he was killed in Iraq. Whatever happened over there killed him inside. That summer, a couple of months before your first birthday, in June, I got a call. He had been gone for a few days. He had been found and taken to a hospital in Cincinnati. They said he had overdosed.”

“No!” He banged his fists on his knees.

“By the time I got there, it was too late. He had about two months left on his Active Reserves contract. He would have had two years of Inactive Reserves after that. The overdose and drug use caused him to be given an ‘Other than Honorable’ discharge.”

“But you said he was a hero.”

“He was Finn. He saved several people’s lives in Iraq. He got medals for it. I have them in a box in my dresser. That’s not the end of it though. He was set to receive the ‘Other than Honorable’ discharge, but before everything was settled, it came to light that the last semester of school, that previous spring, he hadn’t been attending classes after spring break, but he continued to report that he was and he continued to get the monthly payments he was eligible for as a full-time student. When it was discovered that he hadn’t been going, they accused him of fraud for lying about going to school. He also missed his monthly training weekend in May. His discharge status was changed to ‘Dishonorable’. I was fortunate that they didn’t require me to pay back the living expenses portion of the payments because I didn’t have the money.”

Finn had calmed down enough to speak. “So he was a hero, but being in the war did something to him and he eventually turned to drugs and accidentally overdosed and he was dishonorably discharged.”

“Yes.”

“Why didn’t you tell me before?”

“Honestly, you had never had an interest in history or knowing any of the details. I had planned to tell you last year right before you got to the 1990’s in US History. I knew that once you studied more recent events that you would realize that your dad couldn’t have died in Iraq during the Gulf War because it ended more than two years before you were born. But I looked through your history book before spring break and it only covered up through the Reagan administration. I chickened out. I’ve thought about it so many times. How to tell you, how to make you understand that it doesn’t change how much he loved us, or who he was. I’ll never know, but I suspect that something triggered his PTSD and he relapsed before spring break. My assumption is that the
marijuana was no longer strong enough, but it was just strong enough to keep him from realizing that he needed professional help again. I’m guessing whoever he was getting the marijuana from offered him something that would take the edge off a little better. Addiction is vicious. He wasn’t suicidal. He didn’t kill himself. I’ve always thought he got a batch that was laced with something that caused him to die. I’ll never know. But that was the first time that he was gone for more than a day or two.”

“So, why are you telling me now?”

“Because I don’t want you to enlist just because you feel some sense of obligation to follow in your dad’s footsteps. He made a choice. You do not need to feel like you have to make the same choice that he did. And I also wanted you to know that no matter what a recruiter said or didn’t say, joining the military is an 8-year commitment. You’ll be eligible for a GI bill to help pay for college after two years of active duty service. It’s not something that will allow you to go to college in the fall. Plus, I want you to know that Burt and I can afford to send both you and Kurt to state schools.”

“But Kurt…”

“Kurt is considering schools in New York, which is obviously out of state. And some of the schools he’s been looking at are private schools. We can’t afford to send you to college out of state or to a private college, but the colleges you applied to here in Ohio – we can afford those. You’ll have to work summers, like you did last summer to have spending money during the school year and to cover the cost of your phone and gas, but we can pay your tuition and your room and board. With Burt’s new position, we can afford it. And even if he doesn’t run for re-election in three years, we’re planning to put back enough for your fourth years of college during the three years that he’ll be serving during this term.”

“Okay.”

“There is no need for anyone to know the details about how your dad died. You can change the part about him dying in Iraq to saying that he died from complications of something that happened in Iraq because now that you’re older you will run into people who will be able to do the math and they’ll realize that he couldn’t have died before you were born. Very few people will question you after you say that he died because of something that happened during the Gulf War. People are nosy, but not usually nosy about things related to death. And the ones who are, you can tell them that you don’t want to talk about it. That should make them stop asking. You should feel free to tell people that he was a war hero. You can even take pictures of his medals if you want and you can show them to people.”

“So, you don’t want me to enlist?”

“You’re 18, honey. You need to do what you think is right. But you should absolutely NOT enlist because you think your dad would want you to. You can’t make choices for your life based on what you think other people would want you to do, especially people you can’t even ask what they would want.”

Finn took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I get that.”

“There are other ways to be a hero, honey. Being a doctor, a nurse, a fireman, a police officer, or a teacher. You can even be a hero by being an electrician, mechanic, or a construction worker. Every time there’s a natural disaster, people who go and work to restore the power or do repair work are heroes to the people they help.”

“I never thought about it like that.”
“Every time Burt pulls over when someone is having car trouble and he fixes the problem and sends them on their way, he’s a hero to that person. I’ve been a single mom with a kid in a car seat with a flat tire before. I know what it feels like to have someone stop and put the spare tire on for me without asking for money to do it. One time a teen around your age did it for me when I was by myself on the way home from work. I was about 15 minutes late to pick you up from daycare, but without his help, I would have had to get the car towed and then take a taxi to the daycare and another home. That teenager saved me a few hundred dollars that I didn’t have to spare at the time. He was my hero that day.”

“You’re right. Little things matter too. I remember once when me and Puck were like 8, we got in line for the ice cream truck. And the price on the rocket pops had gone up by a nickel. A nickel that neither one of us had. When the guy told us the price, we turned to leave because we didn’t have enough. He pulled two nickels out of his pocket and added it to what we had and gave us each a rocket pop. Two nickels made two little kids super happy.”

Carole smiled. “If you work hard to be a good person, you can be a hero in ways you hadn’t considered before.”

“I have something to tell you.”

“Alright. That sounds serious.”

“It is. It came to mind when you mentioned teachers being heroes. I used to really look up to Mr. Schue. And now, I don’t know what to think.”

“What happened, honey?”

“Well, at the sleepover at Nick’s, we were playing Never Have I Ever and…”

“You were drinking?”

“No. No. We were playing with poker chips, not shots. So, anyway, the two people with the most chips were going to have to make breakfast and Kurt and Sam are the best cooks, so we all made up stuff that we knew one of them had done. Like someone said ‘Never have I ever sewn a whole costume.’”

“I get it now. You were setting it up so they would have to cook for you.”

“Right. So, it only took one time around the circle for Kurt to figure it out and he said we should all just tell our most juicy secret and move on to playing cards instead and that he and Sam would cook. So, I ended up telling about something that happened at school.”

“Honey, it’s fine. You can tell me.”

“Mr. Schue blackmailed me into joining Glee.”

“With what?”

“He said he found pot in my locker during a random locker search and that if I’d join Glee, he’d get rid of it and I wouldn’t get in trouble or risk losing my football scholarship.”

“That’s why you were so upset this fall.”

“That’s what Kurt said too. And yeah, Cooter had been hanging around. I thought he was there for me. Mr. Schue said that two years ago. I thought he knew something I didn’t, like a lot of adults.”
“Oh, honey, that’s terrible.”

“Kurt said that we don’t even have random locker searches, and if we did, they’d be done by the police, but I didn’t know.”

“I’m sure you didn’t. So, you joined…”

“Yeah, and he made me feel real special, you know, like the club was successful because I had joined and I was the perfect male lead for Rachel. And I believed him.”

“Honey, he wasn’t lying about that. You and Rachel do make a very good lead couple. And without you, the club would never have been successful. You were the top of heap. Quinn joined and got Santana and Brittany to join because you did. Mike, Matt, and Puck joined because you did. There were five members. You joining brought six people besides you. You made the club eligible to compete. What he did to get you to join was wrong. I don’t know how to address that right now, but no one else could have joined the group and gotten six more people to join.”

“Since the clubs rejoined after Ms. Corcoran quit, Santana called for new elections. Rachel and I aren’t the leaders anymore. She and Kurt are now.”

“Were the elections fair?”

“Yes. Honestly, we didn’t even have a real election the first time that I remember.”

“This won’t change anything. You were the leader when you included it on your college applications. It won’t really help Kurt or Santana now anyway. All of the application deadlines have passed.”

“It’s just weird. Santana is so mean, but then she can be decent some of the time. She’s a lot less hostile now. But she said that Rachel didn’t deserve to be one of the leaders because she cheated and made Kurt lose the election and that cheaters shouldn’t be leaders.”

“But bullies shouldn’t be leaders either. I get the dilemma. As lame as this answer is going to be, I say just go with it. You have four months of school left. I’m not sure that causing more strife between you and Santana will serve any purpose whatsoever. Being a team player for the last four months you’re going to spend with those 11 people may be the judicious choice.”

“Judicious means wise?”

“Yes.”

“We’re going to start to meet next week to start rehearsing for Regionals.”

“I’ll think about what you said about Mr. Schue. We can talk again after I’ve had time to think.”

“Okay. I’m glad you told me about Dad. I’d like to see his medals.”

“Sure. I’ll show you.” She stood up and brought them back. She laid them out and let Finn photograph them.

“I want to find out what he did to earn them.”

“I’ll find out how we can get that information.”

He took a photo of each medal.
After he finished, Carole put them back in the box she kept them in. She left the box on the desk. “Stand up so I can hug you.” She wrapped her arms around his neck. “I love you, honey.”

He hugged her back. “I know. I love too, Mom.”

“Remember that what you know about your dad – only three people know that. You, me, and Burt.”

“And you can come talk to me about this any time. And if you want to talk to a therapist, please tell me. You already know that it can help.”

Finn nodded. He let go of her and she took a step back. Instead of leaving the office, he sat back down. Carole sat back down as well after she realized that Finn still wanted to talk.

“Yeah, Mom. I know. How did we end up in Lima if you and dad were living in Columbus when I was a baby?”

“After he died, I had to pay for everything on my own and I started looking for a better job in a place that I could afford. We moved here right before your first birthday. The cost of housing here was lower and I found a babysitter that just had a few kids at her house, and kept kids in the evenings. She charged less than the daycare in Columbus would have. And Lori was going to go back to work and put Ryan in daycare since he had turned two. The babysitter was close to where I worked and where we lived. Living here was just a lot more affordable overall.”

“That’s why you never talked to the other moms?”

“I was too busy working. I met Ruth at the hospital. We used to be friends. She took Puck to the same babysitter and we’d even trade so that we’d work opposite shifts so that she’d watch you and I’d watch Puck and neither of us would have to pay for a babysitter whenever we could. But when Puck’s dad lost his job when Ruth was pregnant, well you’re old enough to remember me not letting you go over there anymore and Puck always coming to our place instead.”

“Yeah.”

“We had a fall out and we’ve never been close since.”

“You’re happy with Burt, right? Still?”

“Yes, honey.”

“Good. You deserve to be happy.”

“So do you, honey. Don’t let someone else’s past affect the choices you make for your future, okay?”

He nodded. “Okay. And you’re sure about the college money?”

“Yes, honey. I’m sure. I’ve been putting money into an educational savings account since you were 12. It’s not a lot of money, but it should cover your books for four years. And with our combined incomes, Burt and I can afford to send you and Kurt to state schools. If you decide to transfer to a private school or out of state at some point, you’d have to come up with a way to cover the difference.”

“I get it. I just have to figure out what I actually want to study. I want to tell you something else.”
“What, honey?”

“I think I’m in love with Trish.”

“That’s not surprising. I figured as much.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“Kurt told me something that Burt had told him. Something about how when you find the right person, you realize what you would have given up by staying with the wrong person. Maybe that’s not exactly it, but something like that.”

“Okay.”

“Well, being with Trish is just really different. It’s not like a chase or a game. It doesn’t include a list of things I did wrong during the week or a crazy cat calendar where all my free time is planned out. There’s no guessing or passive/aggressive stuff.”

“That all sounds positive.”

“It is. But it feels wrong, but I know it’s not.”

“You’ve been previously involved with two childish teen girls. Both were very spoiled and demanding in different ways. That doesn’t mean that they won’t grow up to be decent women who eventually end up in good relationships. It just means that they weren’t a good fit for you or maybe anyone while in high school.”

“Yeah.”

“Rachel is an opinionated 17 year old with a big vocabulary and an equally big sense of entitlement. She’s going to be in for a big surprise in the adult world where those things don’t get you very far. College professors will not kowtow to her whims. She is extremely talented. She still has quite a bit growing up to do, which makes sense because she’s a year younger than the rest of the seniors. Think about yourself. How much did you change between your 17th and 18th birthdays? I had spoiled you too, but spending time around Kurt made me realize that I wasn’t doing you any favors by being your mommy. You needed to learn to deal with your own stuff and learn to take care of yourself. From what I can tell, Rachel’s fathers both spoil her and have always made her feel like a princess who ruled her kingdom.”

“Mr. Schue contributed to that according to Kurt. He’s always considered her the star and he made me feel important because Rachel needed a male lead. I bought into my importance being tied to hers. Kurt told me that too. But he also told me that I was good on my own and that I could start a band or something if I wanted to keep singing after high school. That wasn’t what we were talking about though. I was talking about how being with Trish is so different.”

“Trish grew up a long time ago, like Kurt. She and Kurt are a lot alike. They both grew up with single dads that didn’t baby them the way I babied you.”

“I know, but at least I’m not acting like a kid anymore. I hated what you were making me do at the beginning of last summer and it turned out to be really good for me. Back to Trish – do you think it’s too soon for me to be in love with her?”

“No. I told you that I met your dad in June. We were married six months later. I had just turned 20
the week before we got married. Am I suggesting that the two of you get married right after graduation? No. Am I going to prevent you from doing it? No. Do I believe that every person has a soulmate that is out there waiting to be found? No. I think that there are lots of people you would enjoy being married to. I think you can love more than one person, even at the same time. I think some people never find someone. And some choose not to seek a partner or just have no interest. So, I do think you could marry Trish and be happy. I think you could be happy on your own. You know I’ve worked in nursing homes. I’ve seen people 70 years old fall in love.”

‘Yeah, I’ve seen some videos of two really old people getting married.”

“And you need to realize that it’s possible to fall out of love if you don’t work at your relationship. People get married and after a while they start to take their partner for granted and over time they start to ignore their partner for something newer and shinier, even if it’s a hobby. And then they meet new people while doing their new hobby and they feel a spark with someone new. And they go home to their spouse and it feels old and worn and less and less like what they want and they start seeing someone new, with or without breaking it off with their spouse.”

“Yeah. I know all about cheating. Having it done to me and doing it to someone else.”

“I know you do.”

“What you see when you meet someone is their presentation of themselves to the world. Think about how you feel about Kurt now versus how you felt about him two or three years ago. You thought he was a stuck up snob who thought he was better than everyone else and you didn’t like him.”

“Yeah, but he’s not. He’s like a really nice guy. He’s still bitchy.”

“I know. You thought Quinn was meek and sweet, but she’s every bit as conniving as Santana, she’s just more secretive about it.”

“Yeah.”

“When you get married or move in with someone, you finally see what’s behind the mask. You see that someone you thought was really organized actually hates mating socks and just throws them all in a drawer. You find out that the person leaves wet towels on the bathroom floor or they throw their dirty clothes all over the bottom of the closet, not bothering to get them in the basket. Or that they only go through their mail once a month and keep a box by their front door that they put the mail in every day until the one day they go through it comes around. You find people that have all of their shoes piled by the front door. People who sleep nude. People who won’t sleep nude. People who take 45-minute showers. People who drink out of the milk carton. People who leave the bread wrapper open. Everyone has things about themselves that could drive someone else nuts. But two people have to work together to overcome those things. In some ways, getting married young is easier because neither person has had long enough to be super set in their ways. They don’t have a laundry ritual. They’re not 100% committed to a certain brand of dish soap. You know Burt and I struggled with things. Kurt and I struggled more. Kurt ran their household before. It was honestly better that we moved into this house and never tried to live in their house like Burt had asked us to. Your freak-out was uncalled for, but in the end it was good because it gave me and Burt longer to work out our issues. It gave us time to realize that we needed more space to achieve a blended family. Anyway, we were talking about you and Trish. I’m not surprised and I think the two of you are good together. Like Kurt and Sam. They’re not identical in their likes and taste in clothes or food or hobbies, but they work together well. Sam learned to do Kurt’s laundry the way Kurt likes it done. Instead of balking about it or arguing that Kurt was nitpicky and ridiculous, he just took it in stride and enjoyed the happiness it gave Kurt to have his laundry done the way he
liked it.”

“I know how picky he is about his clothes. It probably makes him feel like Sam really cares for him to learn how to do it the way Kurt likes.”

“It also makes Sam feel respected and trustworthy that Kurt would trust him with something he values so much.”

“Yeah. Like he lets Sam drive his Navigator and he won’t let anyone else drive it.”

“Exactly. Being with someone is about more than just finding the person attractive or wanting to have sex with them and I know that you know that. It involves a lot of trust. I don’t think you ever trusted Quinn or Rachel.”

“Probably not in the way you mean. Quinn and I were too young. I didn’t think we were then. But looking back now I do. I guess I’m just wondering if I’ll feel that way again in two years. That was I guess more of what I was asking. I feel like I love her, but what if in two years I realize that I was too young to know what it meant?”

“Honestly, the fact that you wonder that is enough to show me that you’ve grown up a lot. Three years ago when you first wanted to date Quinn and I suggested that you wait until you were older, you sassed me about not being a kid and how you were old enough to know what you were doing. The fact that you’re seeking out answers rather than acting like you know everything is a good sign. You’re moving from the childish belief that being adult sized and being able to physically and mentally do what adults can do is what makes someone an adult to now realizing that there’s a lot more to being an adult than that.”

“Yeah.”

“Those silly birthday cards about it being the 19th anniversary of someone’s 21st birthday instead of saying something about their 40th birthday – it’s kind of like that. There really does come a point at which you stop feeling older and you just start feeling more experienced and more secure in your choices because you’ve faced so many choices already. Sometimes you make the right ones. Sometimes you don’t. Learning from them becomes really important so you don’t keep making the same ones. Once you stop being moved up a grade in school and you graduate, from that point on you really just feel the same. Of course when you get old, your body gets worn out and you can’t do as many things as you could do when you were younger, but mentally for the most part, I feel like I did 20 years ago. So, to answer your question, if two years from now, you feel like being in a relationship with Trish isn’t working, then you have to face that. You have to be honest with yourself and figure out whether you’re just giving up because things are hard with both of you in college or whether you’re choosing to walk away from something that isn’t good for you. And then you have to either choose to work harder or choose to face the fact that it’s time to move on.”

“Being with her is just a lot different. I like it. I like being with her. And I know this might sound weird, but I like it that she likes Kurt and Sam. Like we can all four be here when you guys are gone and it’s nice. It’s fun. She and Kurt bicker and it’s hysterical because it’s all in fun. Last night it was me and Kurt against Trish and Sam playing Mario Kart and it just felt nice. Like family should feel.”

Carole smiled. “I’ve seen it. I think she gets along really well with Sam and Kurt. And it is nice sitting down with all of us. And it does feel like family. And while I really like that, I don’t want you to let other people’s feelings influence how you view your relationship. Despite the fact that I thought you were too young, I supported you when you dated Quinn, to the point of letting her
move in with us. I will love you and be here for you no matter what, even if I don’t like the person you love. I can be respectful and kind.”

“I get that. But I want it all. I want to find someone who will be glad to come here for holidays and be excited to spend time with my family and who will let our kids fight over who is the coolest uncle – Uncle Kurt or Uncle Sam. I don’t want to marry someone who will be like ‘It’s okay to be gay, but not where I can see it.’ Or something dumb like I used to say.”

“That’s what dating is for. You’ve dated three girls and done the one-night stand thing. I can’t tell you what you’re feeling. I can tell you what I see. I see you happy now, whereas you weren’t before. But part of that is because you had become more comfortable with yourself and you were happy on your own. You didn’t start seeing her to boost your school status or to get approval from your friends or family. You did it because you wanted to. I don’t see you acting when she’s around. You aren’t always double-checking what you’re doing or monitoring every word you say. You seem comfortable.”

“I am, which is what makes it different. That’s what made me think of what Kurt said about what Burt told him. If I had stayed with Quinn I would never feel comfortable like I do now. And Quinn just told everyone that she got into Yale. She’s going to leave Lima and never come back.”

“I hope she finds what she’s looking for.”

“Yeah.”

“And Rachel, Kurt, and Blaine got NYADA letters.”

“In four months, everyone will start to go separate ways. The majority will stay here or close by and some will leave for good, like you said about Quinn. I imagine that Rachel will go to New York.”

“What about Kurt and Sam? Are they going to go to the same school?”

“We’ll see in April, just like you and most everyone else who applied to college. That’s when the acceptance and rejection letters will go out.”

Finn sighed, “Dylan and Sebastian will be gone for good too.”

“It’s hard, I know. But this is why it’s important that you make decisions based on your own choices. I know you’ve moved away from it, but you were so accustomed to doing whatever you thought other people wanted that you haven’t had that much practice making decisions independently of peer influence.”

“Are you going to stay here and keep working or are you going to go to DC with Burt?”

“I have to work, so it’s either work here or there. The current plan is for me to work here since I finally have a job with fixed hours. We’re going to work on getting as much time together as we can.”

Finn took a deep breath. “Growing up is a lot harder than I thought it would be.”

She reached over and put her hand on his knee. “I know, honey. You can sit in here and think for a while if you want. I need to go get a load of laundry started. I’ll check on you in 10 minutes or so to see if you want to talk more.”

He nodded and leaned back and closed his eyes to think.
The next week, the New Directions met for the first time before school to start their rehearsals for Regionals.

“Alright, listen up everybody,” Mr. Schue said.

Everyone quieted down.

“We’re going to meet on Mondays and Tuesdays before school to rehearse our group number. Wednesdays and Thursdays will be for the separate groups to rehearse. We’ll add the band in two weeks. They’ll only be joining us on Mondays and Wednesdays. We’ll work out the details. For today, we’re going to get started on a mash up of ‘Fly’ and ‘I Can Fly’.” He handed out sheet music and let them look through it. “It’s pretty complicated. Santana is our only female who can project well enough to do the spoken word solo. So, despite the fact that it may seem a bit uneven that she has a lead in the all-girls song, she will still have the spoken word solo unless one of you can demonstrate that you can do it better than she can. I don’t honestly know whether it will sound better with Blaine or Artie doing the spoken word guy’s part. We’ll try it both ways. The part is marked A/B. Whoever does the spoken word part, will not be singing the featured part. You two can both work on it and next week we’ll listen to both of you and decide.”

They both nodded.

“We’re going to listen to both songs first. Then we’re going to start to work on the parts. We’ll skip the verses and spoken word parts and focus on the parts where everyone sings first. The band worked on this last week and Friday I recorded them. I’ll email everyone the file today and you can start to work on it song at home. Kurt and Quinn sit with Sugar and Tina please in the center please. The rest of the girls sit to my right. Guys to my left. Brad if you will please. We’ll start with the guys.”

That afternoon, Kurt surprised Sam by going to the final swim meet of the year, which was in Marysville. He texted Sam as soon as he pulled in the parking lot.

--I love you. See you soon!

--Soon?

He didn’t answer. He headed inside and sat in the stands and waited for the meet to start.

--Very soon!

He saw Sam come out of the locker room in his robe typing on his phone.

--Are you here?

--Look to your left.

Sam looked up. When he found Kurt in the bleachers, a huge grin spread across his face. He waved, turned, and went back into the locker room. Kurt used his phone to take pictures of the pages he had marked with post-it notes to use for his English paper while the various events took place. He put them away when Sam came out and got his camera out. He took photos during the whole event, hoping that a few would be decent. The buzzer sounded and the lane was called with the winner. It was Sam! Kurt got some photos of him after he realized that he had won. Sam turned
toward where he knew Kurt was sitting and smiled, which Kurt managed to capture. Kurt went back to what he had been doing and finished a few minutes before the meet ended. He texted Sam again.

--Tell Coach Roz that you’re leaving with me.

He didn’t get a response, but 10 minutes later, Sam came bounding out of the locker room. He slid into the spot next to Kurt on the bleacher. Kurt looked towards him and laughed. Sam kissed him.

“You won!”
“I did.”
“Congratulations!”
“Thanks. I think it was because you were here. Knowing you were watching gave me an extra burst of energy.”
“Ready?”
“Definitely.”

Sam grabbed Kurt’s hand and they headed out to the parking lot. When Sam opened the back door to put his duffle in, he saw his regular coat. He slipped his letter jacket off and put it on.

He hopped in the passenger seat, “Are we going somewhere besides home? You brought my coat.”
“Yes, we’re going out to dinner, just the two of us.”
“Sounds perfect.”

It didn’t take long to get to the Mexican restaurant that Kurt had read reviews of online. They went inside and were seated right away. Their server handed them menus and took their drink orders before she walked away. Sam got up and moved so he was sitting in the booth seat next to Kurt rather than across from him.

“You were too away from over there.”

Kurt smiled. He took Sam’s hand. “What sounds good to you?”

Sam looked through his menu. “All of the pictures look good. I’ve never done it before, but we could order a bunch of stuff off the a la carte menu section and try everything. I don’t really care about the rice or beans that comes with a meal. I mean I like them, but I don’t have to have any.”

“Sure. Let’s do it.”

When the server came back, she did a double-take, but then put their drinks down and took their order. Once she left, they started snacking on the chips and salsa.

“The salsa’s good,” Sam said.
“It’s fresh. I like it too.”
“So, DC for spring break. We need to make plans.”
“We do. When we get home, we can ask Carole to borrow her book again. We also need to figure
out if Dad or both of them are going to actually be there that week. They rented a tiny one-bedroom place. You saw the pictures. It’s not really designed for entertaining. If they’re both planning on going that week, we may want to look to find the first week that Dad doesn’t have to be there when we don’t have school.”

Before they got much further in the discussion, the server brought out all of the things they had ordered. They cut most everything in half and started to eat.

“I’ve never had a tostaguac, but I like this. It’s kind of like a flat hard shell taco with the regular taco stuff plus guacamole,” Sam said. “I’ll eat half and leave the rest on the plate since we can’t cut it.”

Kurt nodded. “Ooh. This is good. I’ve never tried tamales, but it’s kind of like cornbread with spicy shredded meat inside. And this green sauce is really good. I don’t know what it’s made out of. We’ll have to look some stuff up and try to make these.”

Sam took a bite. “Mmm. Definitely on the ‘find out how to make these’ list.” He went back to finishing off his half of the tostaguac.

Kurt moved on to the chalupa. He examined it. “This has a flour tortilla bottom instead of corn like the tostaguac. And it has refried beans on it. No guacamole.” He picked it up and took a bite. “I like it. I wonder how they get the bottom to be stiff without burning it. Something else to look up.”

They continued eating without much talking to keep from having cold food.

“Okay. Now that we’re done,” Kurt said, as he pulled out his phone. He opened his notes app. “Tamales. Green sauce. Chalupa bottoms. Carnitas. And a place to get the kind of cheese they serve here.”

“I’m sure they have the cheese at that place in Cincinnati.”

“Jungle Jim’s! We need to go there again.”

“Sounds fun. We can try some more unusual stuff.”

“Maybe we can get your family to meet us and we could do something inexpensive and fun together.”

“Put that on your list too.”

Kurt added a new note. “Done.”

“{}o{}o{}o{}o{}”

“Well, that was a delicious treat that I enjoyed very much and the company was even better than the food,” Sam said.

“Sweet talker.”

“So, next week are we going to Sugar’s V-Day party, as she called it?”

“We can. Or we can make a brief appearance and then go home. Or we can just stay home and decorate each other since we’re each other’s Valentines.”

“Decorate how?”
“Be creative.”

“Hmm. The V-Day part is sounding really uninteresting.”

“It’s my first time having a Valentine, so maybe we could go for a half-hour and then go home.”

“Sure, but now you’ve got me thinking and that’s got my pants getting tighter.”

“We’ll I would be more than glad to take care of that for you when we get home.”

Sam didn’t even bother to undress in the closet. He headed straight to the bathroom and got in the shower. Kurt was laughing when he came in.

“In a hurry?” he teased.

“I still smell like the pool. I wanted to rinse that off more. Come on in.”

“I still want to wash you.”

“I was hoping you did.” Kurt got started on Sam’s hair. “I wish we could just get in bed and snuggle when we get out. I don’t want to do my schoolwork.”

“Me neither, but we need to do it.”

“So many times I wonder why I want to have a stressful job, even if it is exciting. Sometimes I think a nice job at a shop where I could come home to you and just have peaceful evenings sounds so nice.”

“Well, you won’t get any argument for me, but I will also come see you in whatever show you’re in and I’ll be your biggest fan.” He kissed Kurt. “I’ll be your biggest fan whether you’re a mechanic or a Broadway star or anything else.”

“You’re such a sweetie.”

“Well, you make it easy to be sweet to you. I love you. Scoot closer.”

“This close?” He asked cheekily as he closed the distance between them completely.

“Exactly that close.”

“I still want to read books, but I really can’t wait for this class to be over in five weeks. I like our instructor, but I am tired of writing papers. I just want to read something because I want to read it,” Kurt complained.

“I’ll be glad for the exact same reason when the history class ends. Too many people. Too many facts. The information is interesting, but not to have to memorize. It should be a BBC documentary. David Attenborough should be the one to do the audio format for this textbook. That would make it more interesting.”

“If he read it, I’d listen to it.”

Sam laughed. “I’m done. Just done. I can’t focus anymore. Let’s go to sleep we have to be at
school early.”

“I’m not taking four classes next trimester. I’m just not.” Kurt stacked his books up and put what he needed in his bag. He double-checked the lock on the door, turned some music on, and all of the lights off after Sam had finished organizing his stuff.

Sam climbed in bed and pulled the covers up. “Come let me be your pillow.”

“Okay.” He kissed Sam first, and then they got comfortable. “I love you.”

“Sam kissed him on top of the had. “I love you too.”

Kurt leaned in and spoke directly in Sam’s ear so he could hear him over the music. “I’m ready to go whenever you are.”

Sam stood up and led Kurt through the crowded room and outside. They rushed to get into Sam’s trucks where they had left their coats during the party. They slipped them on quickly and slid into the seat. Kurt scooted to the center. They headed home to have their own party.

“That was really boring. It would have be more fun to go to Columbus with Sebastian and Dylan,” Kurt said.

“True, but it’s a Tuesday night and you and I are upstanding students who don’t blow off their classes because they went partying out of town the night before.”

“We could be…”

“Right,” Sam said. “You don’t believe that any more than I do.”

“Plus, they were thinking of going to a regular bar, not one of the 18+ clubs. We don’t have fake IDs.”

“That’s because we’re upstanding students, one of which has a US Congressman for a father.”

“That too. But we’ll have fun at our own celebration.”

Dave sat at the bar, nursing a beer. He was wearing a jeans jacket. He saw a group of guys, all about his age. When he saw the tall, slim guy walk to the jukebox, he got up to go talk to him.

“So, how do you get a guy to like you?”

“You get a guy. Please.”

“Why? What’s wrong with me?”

“Well, first of all, you are about a hundred pounds overweight. Quit waxing your eyebrows, you look like Liberace. In fact, just stay in the closet, buddy.”

The guy slapped Dave on the shoulder and walked off.

Another guy walked up behind Dave. “Hey, dude. Don’t listen to him. He’s just in a foul mood. His boyfriend bailed on him to study tonight. He’s just mad that he won’t be getting any unless he
apologizes for what an ass he was to him before we left to come here.”

“Oh. Well, it’s not the first time I was told I’m too chubby.”

“Well, you’ve been asking the wrong people then. Come dance with me. I’m not into skinny boys. I like my men built. Come put that jacket with our stuff. You’ll get too hot in that on the dance floor. And ignore Sebastian. Like I said, he’s not quite himself tonight. He’s always pretty full of himself, but he’s not usually rude like that.”

“Whatsoever. Where’s your stuff?” Dave followed him to the booth where the group had piled a few jackets.

“I’m Martin, by the way,” he said, as Dave turned back towards him after adding his jacket to the stack.”

“Eddy.”

Martin turned toward the group. “Everyone this is Eddy. Sebastian was a jerk to him a few minutes ago. Eddy this is Thad, David, Robert, Richard, and John.” Martin took Dave’s hand and pulled him away from the table. “They’re not all gay, but I am. Let’s go dance.”

“Why do they go to a gay bar if they’re not gay?”

“To pick up straight girls who come here with their lesbian or gay friends.”

Dave looked at him completely shocked.

“I’m just teasing. They’re gay. I just didn’t want you to pick one of them instead of me. A couple of them go to school with me and Sebastian. The rest are guys we’ve met our age that hang out here. But you are the cutest bear cub I’ve seen around in a while. Have you been here before?”

“Yeah, but I usually come on Saturday afternoons, but it’s Valentine’s Day and this rich girl at school is throwing a party, but no single people are allowed to attend, but the guy I had a crush on will be there with his very out and cute boyfriend.”

“Ah. We’ll, step a little closer, Eddy. I don’t bite, unless you ask nicely.” He moved Dave’s hands to his waist and wrapped his arms around Dave’s neck. He turned them as they danced. “Look to the left of the bar. There’s a semi-circular booth with about six sorority girls from OSU in it. They come to avoid getting hit on when they want to go out drinking, but don’t want groped.”

“Oh.”

“You don’t mind being groped do you, Eddy?” He let his hand slips past Dave’s waist on to the area right above Dave’s back pockets. “Maybe some kissing and see where that leads?”

Dave said nothing and continued to dance with Martin. He let Martin press close and slide his hands down a bit lower. Martin let his hands slide down Dave’s chest and he positioned his hands so that he could run his thumbs across Dave’s nipples through his shirt. Dave’s breath hitched. Martin smiled. He leaned closer.

“I’m going to kiss you unless you object.”

Dave didn’t resist. Martin pressed his lips to Dave’s. Within a few seconds, they were practically making out while continuing to sway in place. They broke apart for air.
“Well, that was hot. You are one sexy bear cub.”

Dave blushed, but in the dim lighting, no one could see. “You’re pretty hot yourself.”

“Let’s dance and kiss some more.”

After a few more slower songs, someone had obviously decided to change up the pace and put in some club dance songs.

“Come with me out to my car? I don’t do public bathrooms.” Martin said. “I know it’s cold out there, but I’ll make sure we stay warm.” He winked at Dave. He leaned in closer. “I have what we need, in case you didn’t bring anything.”

Dave looked him over and said, “Sure.”

“I’ll be right up,” Sam said.

He went into the kitchen, grabbed what he needed from the fridge and from the cabinet and went upstairs. He shut and locked the door behind him. He turned around to find Kurt getting something out of the cabinet where they kept the art supplies. He stood up holding a pack of markers. He saw Sam holding two small brown paper sacks.

“What’s in the bags?”

“You’ll see. What are the markers for?”

“To decorate you, of course. They’re washable.”

“Oh.” Sam put the sacks down on the dresser and stood between Kurt and the sacks.

Kurt moved closer so he could see what was in the sacks. Sam intercepted and blocked him from looking.

“Please let me see.”

Sam stepped to the side. Kurt looked in one. “Hot fudge sauce? Caramel?”

“Are we having dessert? Is the ice cream in the other sack?”

Sam shook his head. “You’re the ice cream.”

It took Kurt a few seconds to process. “You’re going to put the sundae toppings on me? And lick…” Kurt reached in the sack and took the stuff out. “I guess I should get undressed then. How are we going to keep from getting it all over the bed?”

“I found an old blanket in the linen closet downstairs.”

“Perfect. Let’s take the comforter off just in case. It will be easier to wash and dry the other stuff if any of it soaks through.” Kurt turned around and folder it up and put it on their table.

Sam pulled the blanket out of the closet. “I washed and dried it this afternoon.”

“Thanks.” Kurt helped him get it on the bed.
“What were you planning with the markers?”

“You’ll see. We’re going to need several showers.”

Sam waggled his eyebrows. “Who goes first?”

“Me. Lie back.”

Kurt took a pink marker out of the box. He drew hearts all over Sam. Next he took out a red marker. He wrote “I love you” in a bunch of different languages. When he finished, he took out purple marker and wrote loving words about how he saw Sam all over him. Special, loving, kind, smart, funny, caring, optimistic, generous, friendly, sweet, and other things that came to mind while he was working. Sam was too curious and propped up from time to time to see what Kurt was writing. When he was done, he put the marker back. He kissed Sam. “There. Now, what’s on your inside shows on the outside. Plus, I wrote ‘I love you in like ten languages.’”

“I want a picture.”

“Um.”

“I’ll put pajama pants on.”

“Okay.” Kurt got up and grabbed his camera.

Sam grabbed pajama pants and stood in front of the closet door. Kurt took a few pictures and showed him. He put the camera on the dresser. Sam grabbed the stuff from the bags and put it in the breakfast tray he had already brought upstairs and put it on the bed without popping the legs up.

“Let’s shower.”

When they got back out, Kurt became Sam’s canvas.

“A silicone basting brush? Very creative,” Kurt said. After Sam started to use it on him, he said, “And much more arousing than I had expected.”

“Good.”

“I’m sorry all of the red marker didn’t come off. I thought it would.”

“I don’t mind. The rest will fade eventually and until then I’ll just have reminders of how much you love me written all over me.” He leaned forward and kissed Kurt. “I love you so much.” He went back to painting his masterpiece.

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They switched places and Sam let Kurt decorate him with his “art supplies”. They showered a second time and folded the blanket up and put the comforter back on the bed and snuggled up together.

“So much better than the party,” Kurt said. “Your art supplies were a lot of fun and very tasty.”

“I liked your idea. It made me feel really loved. You know I still struggle with feeling like more than anything but a nice physical specimen. But you always know just how to remind me that I’m more than that.”
Kurt kissed him. “You’re a lot more than that. I’m so glad you’re my Valentine.”

“Me too. I love you. More kisses.”

“I love you too. Definitely more kisses.”

Kurt went running to Miss Pillsbury’s office. He opened the door and closed it behind him. “I can’t say why, but can you please leave the room? I need to make a phone call NOW.”

“Yes, of course.” She moved and went out into the hallway.

Kurt picked up the phone and pulled up his contacts. He dialed the number.

“Hello?”

“Dave. It’s me. DON’T come to school! Someone saw you wherever you were last night. There are photos taped everywhere. Your locker’s been vandalized.”

“Oh, God!”

“Don’t say anything else. Do what you need to do. Call me later.”

“Right.”

Kurt hung the phone up. He opened the door and let Miss Pillsbury back in. He closed it back behind her.

“Kurt?” She was holding a stack of the photos that she had pulled down while he was in her office. They had started in the hallway past her office. Obviously, they had seen her lights on and avoiding taping them up where she would be able to see them through her office windows.

“Dave’s gay. Now everyone will know. Sam and I can’t be here today. As soon as Glee is over, we’ll need as escort. My locker has been vandalized as well.” He showed her a photo of his locker with “Die fag maker!” and “2 is enuf. No more!” written on it with a thick Sharpie. He switched the photo to show her Dave’s locker, which had “The only good fag is a dead fag” written on it.

She shook her head. She looked like she was going to cry.

Kurt pointed to the photos in her hand. “That’s not me in that photo with him, but the guy looks enough like me in that lighting for everyone to think it is. I actually think I know who that is. He goes to Dalton. We weren’t friends and I didn’t know he was gay. Morgan, Martin, Marshall… something with an M. Anyway, friends of ours from Dalton and a group of other Dalton guys were going out last night. They invited me and Sam, but we turned them down because it was too far to drive on a school night. Plus, they were considering a bar instead of an 18+ club, and we don’t go to bars.”

“I need you to just go home now. Glee will live without rehearsing today. I’m going to get the Glee kids to help me pull down as many of these photos as we can. Get Sam and get out of here. Go! I’m going to assume that you called Dave. It’s fine. Outgoing calls can’t be traced to a single location in the building and I would have called his house, which given your reaction would have been a bad idea.”

Sam came running up and opened the door and came inside. “I grabbed everything from both of
our lockers. Mine’s been vandalized as well. I took a photo.” He showed Kurt, who then showed it to Miss Pillsbury. It had “Stop spreading your fairy dust” and “Burn in hell fag!” written on it in Sharpie.

Kurt gave Sam his phone back and continued what he was saying to Miss Pillsbury. “Well, you can call his house or parents or whatever, but wait until all of the other truancy calls are made today.”

“Alright. Kurt, I’m going to trust you on this because I know this affects you as well. You and Sam need to leave.”

Kurt and Sam drove home in silence.

As soon as they got in the house, Kurt’s anger had subsided enough that his rational thought processes returned. He pulled his phone out and called Aunt Eunice.

“Aunt Eunice, it’s Kurt.”

“Yes, honey. What wrong?”

“The guy we talked to you about. He just got outed at school. It’s bad. He’s on his way to your place. He’s going to be really upset. At least I hope he’s on his way to your place. If he’s not there in three and a half hours, let me know.”

“I will, honey. What happened?”

“He went to a bar or club in Columbus last night and somehow someone recognized him and when we got to school this morning for early Glee rehearsal, there were photos of him kissing a guy who looks a lot like me as far as hair color and overall physical build. It was a photo taken with a phone and so it’s not top quality and it’s just clear enough to look like it’s me and just blurry enough to not be able to prove that it’s not. I’m pretty sure it’s this guy that goes to Dalton. Sebastian and Dylan and some other guys were planning on going out last night.”

“What a mess, honey. Well he’s welcome here until he figures out what to do.”

“I have to figure out what to do too. There’s a potential death threat on my locker for turning him gay. And Sam’s locker says awful stuff as well. When he gets there, have him use your landline to call me.”

David grabbed his football duffle. He wrapped his xBox in a hoodie and put it inside. He grabbed all of his games and wrapped them in a t-shirt and shoved them in too. He grabbed his two best pairs of sneakers. He put his boots on. He grabbed his favorite stuff from the closet and shoved it all in the duffle. He had already packed a small box of mementos and he grabbed it as well and put it in. He hurried in the bathroom and used one of the small trash bags his mom used on his bathroom trashcan and put all of his stuff in it quickly. He grabbed his electric razor too. He tied the trash bag shut and put it in. He looked around the room. He put his laptop and charger in his backpack and left the books on his desk. He opened his dresser and put all of his socks and underwear in the backpack instead. He grabbed a couple of pairs of lounge pants and sweats and stuffed them in the duffle as well.

One more quick check around the room and he saw his expensive calculator on his desk. He grabbed that and put it in the backpack. He had already managed to take his birth certificate and
social security card when he was supposed to be putting the title to the truck in the safe, which he
didn’t do. He put all three in a folder in his room. He slipped it into the laptop section of the
backpack.

He sat down at his desk and wrote a note letting his parents know that he was leaving, and then he
quickly copied down the information he needed from his phone. He deleted all the apps on his
phone that he had downloaded. He unlinked the phone from his iCloud account, erased the phone,
restored it to factory settings, and removed the sim card. He put the phone on top of the note. He
put the paper with all of the information on it in the front of his backpack.

He took the duffle, his backpack, and his skate bag to his truck. When he got outside to put
everything in, he realized that both of parents had already left for work. He went back inside and
took a large yard waste bag upstairs to his room. He opened his closet and put all of the rest of the
clothes that he liked in the bag. He dumped his laundry in the top and put the rest of his shoes into
the laundry basket. He emptied the rest of the clothes from his dresser into the bag as well. He
stopped and made his bed and moved the phone and note to the center of the bed. He grabbed the
giant trash bag, his one suit that fit, and the laundry basket and put them in his truck and left.

Sue Sylvester walked into the gym. All of the Cheerios had been summoned during first period.

“One of you knows something or knows how to find out. Second period, each of us will meet
individually and you will all tell me what you know. If by the end of second period I don’t know
who taped those photos up and vandalized school property, the Cheerios will not compete at
Nationals.”

“What?”

“NO!”

And a lot of other grumbling was heard.

“You know what to do then. Find out who it was.”

No one moved.

“GET OUT OF HERE AND FIND OUT!”

After the third time of hearing the same details, Coach Sylvester dismissed the last Cheerio to visit
her office. She walked straight to Principle Beiste’s office. She opened the door and let herself in.

“McGreilen.”

“Excuse me?”

“Stephanie McGreilen. She was a student here three years ago. She’s 21. Goes to OSU. Her twin
brother Shawn attended McKinley as well, and was on the hockey team. He was a senior when
Karofsky was a freshman. Stephanie was in Columbus in the club or whatever where Karofsky was
last night. She was there with some sorority sisters.”

“In a gay club?”
“To avoid being hit on, so I’m told. Anyway, she texted the photo to Shawn. Shawn posted it to Dave’s Facebook page. From there, it spread the way all things spread.”

“Got it. Any leads on who vandalized the lockers?”

“They won’t budge. They’re circling the wagon as usual. Even with the threat of pulling the Cheerios from Nationals, they couldn’t get anyone to break rank.”

“I’ve already gotten a call from Mrs. Huntington.”

“Great. Hummel’s attack dog has already been notified.”

“Well, what was written on Kurt’s locker qualifies as a second death threat. We knew that if he was unsafe here that she’d come after us. Oh, and that’s not all the bad news I’ve received recently, but I’m not at liberty to discuss the other matter yet.”

“Lovely.”

“Actually, I’m going to have to ask you to leave because I need to see Miss Pillsbury. If you find out anything else, let me know.”

Coach Sue walked out. Miss Pillsbury gave her a wide berth, and then walked into Principle Beiste’s office.

“Mrs. Huntington has already contacted me.”

Miss Pillsbury sat down on the front edge of one of the seats. “I see. I haven’t been able to find out anything about the vandalism.”

“Neither could Sue. And she threatened not take the Cheerios to Nationals if they couldn’t get her the information she needed. We do know how it was spread though – Facebook.”

“Well, I’ll go back to my office and prepare for David to be transferred somewhere else. I’ll get his current grades from Econ and whatever else he’s taking. I can’t think what it is right now. I’ll get his transcript printed and all of the paperwork done. Did Mrs. Huntington say when we’re meeting?”

“Not yet. She’s waiting to hear from David.”

“Right. I’ll go get busy. Should I do Kurt’s and Sam’s as well?”

“I guess. They only have one class. It won’t be that hard to do and at least it will be ready if we need it.”

She nodded and left.
Kurt’s phone rang right as he and Sam were walking into their English class. Kurt turned around and walked away and Sam went inside and sat down.

“Dave. Finally. I was getting worried.”

“Well, when I realized that my parents had already left, I went back in and brought out the rest of my stuff. I figured why leave anything behind if I could bring it. I also stopped to empty out my checking and savings account so that they couldn’t get someone they know at the bank to tell them where I was using my debit card.”

“That makes sense to bring everything and good thinking on the bank issue. I need you to call Mrs. Huntington so she can get working on your new placement.” He gave Dave her number. “I already talked to her about the threat on my locker. Sam and I may be heading to a new school as well or finishing out the year independent study or being escorted in and out of the building. I don’t know.”

“God, it’s all my fault. I was so stupid. I’ve been to that place a lot of times. I usually wear a trucker hat and I just sit and talk to some of the guys there. I go on Saturday afternoons. It’s nice. I felt accepted there. I was stupid enough to drive there last night. I tried to talk Sebastian up…”

Kurt burst out laughing. “Sorry. Sorry. I didn’t mean anything toward you. But I can bet that didn’t go well. I was just imagining what a smart ass he probably was to you. I never envisioned the two of you meeting each other.”

“Yeah. Anyway, a guy named Martin starting talking to me and told me to ignore Sebastian because he was in a bad mood. Martin was totally flirty and coming on to me. It was stupid. I’ve been there so many times and never done anything like that in public view. I’ve made out with a few guys in my truck or whatever, just kissing, but never on the dance floor. But he was all sorts of hot and had his hands all over me. He was gentlemanly and asked if he could kiss me. And damn, he’s a good kisser, but fuck – now everyone knows. I was so close. And that asshole Shawn had to go a post that photo to my Facebook page. I deactivated my account once I got to Zanesville – in the McDonald’s where I got something to eat. I saw it when I logged on to check my messages. That’s when I realized that it wasn’t just photos someone printed and put up at school. That photo is …”

Kurt interrupted him. “People think that Martin is me.”

“He doesn’t look like you in the face, but I could see why after seeing the photo. The way we were standing blocked his face more. He’s about your height and build. Fuck, fuck, fuck. So, now everyone at school thinks I was kissing you?”

“Oh, no. They think I was kissing you. My locker says ‘Die fag. Two’s enough. No more.”

“Oh, God.”

“So, you took all of your stuff from your house?”

“Well, not my phone. I erased it and put a huge passcode on it, so it will lock up and never be able to be opened after someone tries a few times. I deleted it from my iCloud and Apple ID before I
reset it. I left it with a note that I wasn’t coming back. The truck is in my name only. I’ll have to get new insurance right away though to be able to drive it. I need to call the company and get my name off my parents’ policy.”

“Be sure to block the outgoing number on the landline before you call anyone else that might be inclined to give your parents the number.”

“I’ll do that. Star 67 right?”

“Or you could send me the details and I could call from the library here in town. There’s still a payphone there. That way if your parents get really determined, they can’t trace it to Zanesville.”

“Sure. I’ll tell you all of the info to do it before I hang up. I have my birth certificate and my social security card. Actually I’ll just tell you the insurance stuff now.” He gave Kurt all of the details. “I’m going to hang up and call Mrs. Huntington. I’m fine. I’m so mad at myself, but I’m fine. Less the four months and I blew it. I’ll have to call the colleges I applied to and change my contact information to get my acceptance letters. I have to start a list and I’m used to making lists on my phone. I have to go find some paper. I’ll call you back later.”

“I’m glad you’re okay. I’ll go to the library or somewhere with a payphone and cancel your insurance. Get Aunt Eunice to take you to her agent and get a new policy as soon as you can.”

“I will. I gotta go for now.”

Kurt left the building and looked for a payphone. He couldn’t find one. Eventually he just went in one of the offices and asked to use the phone. The secretary pointed to an empty office with a desk and a phone in it. He went inside and blocked the outgoing number just in case and called Dave’s insurance company like he said he would. He thanked the secretary before he left. He walked back to their English classroom and just sat on a bench in the hallway near the room, not wanting to interrupt.

When the class let out, Kurt went in. After everyone left, he approached their instructor.

“I’m not sure how to explain this, but someone had an emergency that I had to help them with.”

“Kurt. It’s okay. I saw you start to come in and then leave on your phone when I was walking to the classroom. I saw Sam sit down without you. Things happen. I hope whatever it was is going to be okay.”

Kurt just nodded. Sam took his hand and they left to go to their Modern History class.

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Usually Kurt and Sam ate lunch together on campus before Sam dropped Kurt off at the shop and went back to the resource center on campus to get help with his English work, and then to the art studio to work on his projects. But Kurt didn’t want Sam by himself on campus until they had more time to figure out what to do about everything. Sam had been grabbed before and he didn’t want a repeat of that.

Since Finn was still at school, Sam set up in the lounge and worked on his Modern History and English since that’s all he had with him. Kurt worked his shift. They left together once he had finished and went straight home. It was already dark out. Kurt texted Finn from the driveway and asked him to turn all of the front lights on. He did, and then he opened the door and walked out onto the porch as Kurt hit the garage door opener. Finn watched to make sure no one went in the garage while it was open. He went back in and reset the security system. He waited for Kurt and
Sam to come in and he reset the security system again.

“I saw your lockers when Miss Pillsbury came in and asked us to help take down the photos. A bunch of the jocks with hoodies up and their letter jackets on were taping them up faster than we could get them down. It was pointless. We did get some photos of some of them taping them up, but I don’t if they can be ID’ed or not with their hoods up like that. No one will break ranks and say who wrote on the lockers, though. No one would tell me anyway because they know I’ve become ‘soft’. Blaine’s pretty freaked out though.”

“His locker hadn’t been vandalized.”

“But he’s gay and he’s freaked out about the… What did he call it?... The implied death threats.”

“He should go back to Dalton,” Kurt said. “I’ll call him. Maybe you and Sam can make dinner.”

“Yeah, sure. I’m a terrible cook, but Sam can boss me around and give me the easy jobs.”

Sam laughed.

“I’m going to go in Dad’s office and call him too.” Kurt went the opposite direction.

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“Hey, Blaine.”

“Hi, Kurt.”

“Is your mom home?”

“Yeah.”

“Can you go wherever she is and put me on speaker?”

“Yeah, sure.”

Kurt could hear a door open, and then Blaine calling out for his mom.

“Okay. You’re on speaker.”

“Hi Mrs. Anderson. My name is Kurt Hummel. I need to give you a name and phone number.”

“Just a minute, Kurt. Let me get a piece of paper. Okay, I’m ready.”

Kurt gave her Mrs. Huntington’s name and phone number. “She will be meeting with me and Sam probably tomorrow. She’s our advocate. I’m not sure what you may or may not know about me.”

“Blaine mentioned you last year when you transferred to Dalton about how you were bullied and you left McKinley, but then Rachel told us how the school had changed and that you were going back this year. But Blaine told me about the pictures and what was on the lockers today.”

“Yeah, it would probably be better if you bring him to the meeting with Mrs. Huntington. I don’t think that the vast majority of the kids at school know that Blaine is gay. He hangs around with Rachel all the time. Most of them probably think that Blaine is Rachel’s boyfriend. He and I only have Glee together before school and Econ first period, but all of the Glee Club members that are in Glee are in the same section of Econ. I leave the building right after first period every day, so no one sees the two of us together to associate him with me.”
“I see.” She asked Blaine, “Have you told people you’re gay?”

“No. The Glee Club members already knew from our interactions last year, but the rest of the school would only know if someone from Glee Club has been talking about it. And he’s right. Rachel and I had the leads in the play, as you know. And she and I have some classes together and we sit together then and at lunch. I never thought about people thinking that we’re dating, but anyone who came to the play has seen us kiss and it’s possible that they think we’re dating. I don’t hang around with any of the jocks besides Puck and Mike, and they’re both in Glee.”

“Well, there are 14 weeks of school left, counting spring break. So, we need a plan for the next 14 weeks. Call Mrs. Huntington and leave a message letting her know that you’d like to attend the meeting tomorrow. And if you can’t meet with us for whatever reason, get an appointment to see her on your own. I was thinking of suggesting that Blaine just go back to Dalton, but then I remembered he’s graduating early and he wouldn’t have enough credits to graduate early if he went back to Dalton because of the different requirements.”

Mrs. Anderson said, “We talked about that when he told me what happened after I got home from work a little while ago.”

“Blaine, you can take this or leave this. You know that I don’t kowtow to how everyone else dresses, but if you want to fit in more, try pomade in your hair. Cut the sides and back shorter, like you had it when we first met. Go with some pomade to tame the frizz. Don’t wear bowties. Wear your Levi’s and wear socks. No bowties. Ditch the patterned cardigans and sweater vests. Dress like Mike, but without the sneakers. No more colorful pants or bowties or hair gel are the main things. I know you have your own unique style and I’m not dissing it. But your style doesn’t scream straight boy. If you want to stay under the radar for 14 weeks, you could consider changing your style until after graduation.”

Blaine asked, “What are you going to do?”

“Honestly, I have no idea right now. Sam and Finn are making dinner. I haven’t even been home from work long enough to eat yet. I have to call my parents and tell them what happened.”

Mrs. Anderson said, “I hadn’t thought about the fact that your parents might be in Washington, DC. Do you and whoever else you mentioned, your brothers or whoever, need somewhere to stay?”

“We’re fine. We have a top-notch security system. My dad had it installed before the election due to the press hanging around.”

“That’s good,” she said. “If you change your mind, just call. We don’t have a lot of room, but you three boys are welcome if you need a place to go.”

“Thanks. I appreciate that. I need to make that call now.”

“Thank you for calling, Kurt.”

“You’re welcome, Mrs. Anderson.” Kurt disconnected the call.

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He took a deep breath, and called Burt. “Hey, Dad.”

“Hey, bud. What’s up?”

“I’m going to text you a few photos, and then we can talk. I’ll call Carole’s phone as soon as I send
them, so we can talk while you both look at the photos.”

“Okay.”

Kurt disconnected the call, sent the photos, and called Carole’s phone.

“Oh, my God, honey. Was that today?”

“Yes. Aunt Eunice got a visitor this morning.”

“Right. Okay. So, now what’s happening?”

“We’re meeting with Mrs. Huntington tomorrow. I don’t know what will happen. I just wanted you to know. The photos that were printed up and taped up all over school. And they’re cheap photocopies. The guy in the photo is similar to me in build and hair color. So, everyone thinks it’s me in the photos that were EVERYWHERE at school.”

“Honey, you call me after you talk to her. You three stay safe and keep the alarm set at all times.”

“We are.”

Burt spoke. “I want you to leave the shop at 5:00 for the rest of the week until I come home this weekend. They’ll just be a little short staffed for an hour. It will be fine. I want you home before it gets dark out.”

“Alright. I can do that. So, you’re coming home this weekend?”

“I am now. And if for some reason I can’t, Carole will be home anyway. She has to work next week.”

“I need to go eat and do schoolwork. I just wanted you to know.”

“Thanks. Let us know what happens tomorrow.”

“I will.”

When he hung up, he realized he needed to make one more call.

“Hey, Kurt.”

“Hey, Bas. I need to ask you something.”

“What?”

“Is Martin out? Like out out?”

“To his family, you mean?”

“Yeah.”

“I have no idea. Why?”

“Because this morning about 200 copies of a photo of him kissing Dave were taped up all over McKinley and it was posted to Dave’s Facebook page before he deactivated it. I don’t know how likely it would be for it to ever get back to Martin’s family, but I thought he should at least know
about it. Unfortunately for me, the photo is pretty low res and taken from an angle that mostly blocks Martin’s face and everyone at school thought it was me kissing Dave.”

“Dave? The bear cub?”

“Yeah. He said he tried to chat you up and you were rude to him, but Martin took an interest in him and they were dancing and kissing in public. Dave wasn’t out.”

“You knew though.”

“Yeah.”

“Wait. He’s the one that threatened you last year causing you to come to Dalton.”

“Bingo. A jock, who was outed by a photo that looks like I am kissing him. I don’t know what’s happening with school, but I’ll either have to finish out somewhere else or I’ll have to be escorted at all times while on school grounds. I can’t go out after dark.” Kurt texted him the photo of the three lockers. “Look at those.” Kurt waited while Sebastian switched to view the photos.

“That’s absurd. You didn’t turn anyone gay. How stupid are these people?”

“Stupid enough to hurt Sam. You already know that. And as soon as they get an opportunity, I’ll be next or Sam again because they know that them hurting him kills me.”

“I don’t even know what to say.”

“That’s because there are no words to say. Did you and Dylan make up?”

“How do you know about me and Dylan?”

“Dave said that Martin said that you were in a bad mood, and I can’t imagine anything putting you in a bad mood more than forced celibacy would.”

“Yeah, well… Dylan and I aren’t speaking right now.”

“Why?”

“BecauseIfellinlovewithhim and I’mtoomuchofanassstoadmitit.”

“What? My French is pretty good and that just sounded like nonsense.”

“Because I fell in love with him and I’m too much of an ass to admit it.”

“Oh, Bas. Go to him right now and apologize.”

“He wanted a night in with his boyfriend – just the two of us. I was a smartass and said that he was only my boyfriend in name and that I was going out to the club. And I told everyone else that he ditched me to do homework.”

“Sebastian Smythe, get to his room and grovel, you total ignoramus. Clearly he has feelings for you and you were awful. If you love him go talk to him.”

“We’re going home to separate countries in June.”

“London and Paris are like six hours apart. That’s like driving from here to Tennessee. Stop being an idiot and go apologize to your man. He could go to school in Paris. There are English-speaking
university programs in Paris. You could go to school in England.”

“This wasn’t supposed to happen.”

“Then let a great guy go because you’re too chicken to tell him how you feel.”

“Don’t mince words, Kurt. Tell me what you really think,” he snarked back.

“I love you and you know that. Go get your man. Call me back after you make things right with him. And you can let Martin know about the photo. Do that first, quickly. You can give Martin my number if you want. Then you go find Dylan and tell him the truth.” Kurt disconnected the call.

After they had finally finished their schoolwork, Kurt and Sam stacked their books up. Kurt got up and turned the lights off. He plugged in the twinkle lights and turned some music on. He went in the closet and stripped down to his underwear. Sam followed him in the closet and saw what he was doing. He undressed as well.

“May I have this dance?” Kurt asked.

“Yes, of course.” Sam took his hand and led him out of the closet and assumed a slow dance position. “I quite like slow dancing in our underwear. Definitely much better than slow dancing in suits, although you do look quite dashing in a suit.” Sam kissed him quickly.

“You do as well. And I like dancing like this, but the suits are a better bet for most occasions.”

After a couple of songs, Kurt led them toward the shower. When they finished, Kurt curled up tight behind Sam. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Kurt’s phone rang as he and Sam were on their way to the school district office building to meet with Mrs. Huntington in the smaller room where Sam had met with her the first time. He saw Sebastian’s name as the incoming number.

“Good morning, Bas.”

“It is a good morning. A lovely, sunless February morning in rural Ohio.”

“Mmm hmm. And from your chipper tone, I’m supposing you had a very lovely night last night.”

“I did quite enjoy my evening and night and late night and early morning.”

“Enough!”

Sebastian laughed. “I told him. He told me. Now, we’re all sickeningly lovey dovey like you and Sam, Nick and Jeff, and Finn and Trish. How did this happen to me?”

“Well, I think it happened when you figured out how nice it is to be with someone you also enjoy spending time with.”

“Blech. Ick. I’m supposed to be immune to that B.S,” he mock grumbled.
“Congratulations! I’m happy for you. For both of you.”

“Well, my maman will be thrilled. She sent me to live with my dad and I found a boyfriend – an English boyfriend. She’s going to laugh about that one for a while. She sends me all the way to America to stop being a playboy and I find a British boyfriend.”

“But he’s a really nice guy.”

“I know. Why on earth does he love me? I’m a codgery old curmudgeonly Frenchman with a conquest list too long to list.”

“Well, from what you said, he was the same, at least with the list.”

“But he’s sweet.”

“You can be when you’re not being an ass.”

“But he likes my ass.”

“Well, there’s your answer.”

“You’re my best friend. You’re supposed to build me up.”

“You have an ego as tall as the Eiffel Tower already. I have to go. We’re at the school district office to see whether Sam and I are going to be moved schools or what.”

“Call me and let me know what’s going on. I do care.”

“I know you do. I’m glad for you and Dylan.” Kurt disconnected the call.

“What was that about?” Sam asked.

“Sebastian was an ass when Dylan asked him to stay in for Valentine’s Day, just the two of them. And he went out without Dylan. He panicked about Dylan being in love with him and he was a jerk. He went and apologized last night and they made up. And he told Dylan that he loves him.”

“Good for him. Let’s go inside.”

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“It’s good to see the two of you, but not in these circumstances,” Mrs. Huntington said. “So much of what went on last school year made sense the instant David called me yesterday. When he asked to meet you in the hall, what did he tell you?”

“That someone else at school had figured out that he was gay and that he was being blackmailed. I put an end to that, but nevertheless, now everyone knows and some of them want him gone. And I’m being blamed – for turning him and Sam gay.”

“Which of course is stupid,” she said.

Kurt nodded and asked, “So, what are our options?”

“Well, the best option I see is for you two to double-down on your Economics and complete the course before spring break. That would be the end of your requirements to be at McKinley. You’ll park in the teachers’ lot and Principal Beiste will escort you in and out of the building.”
“That’s in four weeks. So, we’d park in the teachers’ lot, be escorted in and out, finish Econ by spring break, and then not go back until graduation?”

“Exactly.”

“What about Glee?” Sam asked.

“Well, my understanding is that Regionals is in two weeks. Let’s get through these two weeks and see if your group even wins. If they win, we’ll have to discuss your continued participation.”

“Okay,” Kurt said. “Did you talk to Mr. Sanchez?”

“I did. He’s willing to forego the notebook grade, the end of course presentation, a couple of the papers, and he’ll write tests specifically for the two of you that only cover the material in the Econ book. We’ll still have to figure out how to handle the test taking.”

“Alright,” Kurt said. He looked at the calendar app on his phone. “We have 12 weeks of class left not counting this week since we only have today and Friday. Divide by two, multiple by five. That’s 30 classes. We have 28 days before spring break, not counting Regionals. So, we’d have to do the equivalent of one classroom session every day until spring break since you mentioned there were a couple of days set aside for presentations and then the final class would be a review for the final exam.”

“That could work,” she said.

“We don’t really have free time to devote to getting it done early with our other OSU classes, but we can do our best. We’ll need the new schedule for what we need to get done every day for the next 28 days. He has his planning period 2nd period. Maybe he could at least give us that we need to do for the next four days. And then hopefully next Tuesday we could get the rest of the schedule from him.”

“I’ll talk to him. Write down your email address so I can have him send it to you.”

Kurt took the piece of paper she gave him and wrote it down and gave it back.

Sam asked, “Are we just going to come for Glee and then leave?”

“That’s the plan. It won’t make any sense to have you sit in class for nearly two hours when you could use that two hours to do the work you need to do to get done quickly and Mr. Sanchez would be going over material that you no longer need to hear.”

“Are we going to just go back home?” Sam asked.

“As long as you can work there.”

Kurt said, “We can.”

There was a knock at the door. Mrs. Huntington got up and opened it. “Mrs. Anderson, and Blaine.” She offered her hand and shook both of theirs. “Please come in and have a seat. This is Kurt Hummel and Sam Evans, in case you haven’t met.”

Mrs. Anderson said, “It’s nice to put names with faces. Kurt called last night.”

Kurt noted that Blaine hadn’t put nearly as much hair gel in and he was wearing a long-sleeved button-down shirt with a pair of Levi’s and a pair of Sperry’s. They both took their coats off and
put them over a chair and sat down.

Mrs. Huntington spoke first. “Currently there is no known threat against Blaine. It is undetermined how many of the students know that he is gay. I’m torn between doing something to protect him and doing something that draws attention to him and inadvertently singles him out for harassment when he is currently not being harassed.”

Mrs. Anderson nodded. “Kurt mentioned last night that it’s highly possible that most of the students think that Blaine is Rachel’s boyfriend since they spend nearly all their time at school together and have done so ever since he enrolled back at the beginning of the school year.”

“No one knows much about him,” Kurt said. “As far as anyone knows, he’s a senior transfer. Other than Rachel and me and Sam, I’m not sure that anyone else even knows that he should be a junior and that he’s graduating early. And unless he told people where he went to school before, only the Glee Club knows. He already had his gym credits so he only uses the fitness areas. Has anyone harassed you in the locker room or the weight room?”

“No. I was teased a little about being small, but after some of the guys saw me punching the bag, the worst I got was ‘fly weight’. Usually Puck goes with me, so no one says much of anything.”

Mrs. Huntington said, “I think the best thing to do might be to just ride it out for a week. Let Coach Sue keep an eye on him from down the hall. Meet up with someone at your car and walk into the building with someone. Go from class to class with someone, maybe this Puck you mentioned. If you receive any type of threat, contact me again. There’s every possibility that this is directed solely at Kurt and Sam. I know this sounds like strange advice coming from an advocate, but you are so close to graduating and you’ve attended three high schools already. There aren’t any schools close by where you can take 7 classes like you are now. The other high schools within driving distance only offer 6 periods. And trying to change schools a third of the way through the semester in your last semester of school – it won’t be easy.”

“I get it,” Blaine said. “I think I’ll take Kurt’s advice, like I did today, and just dress more casual. Leave the sweater vests and patterned cardigans at home. I’ll get a couple more pairs of Levi’s, but not go so far as to wear tennis shoes and hoodies because that would look totally different. I’ll dress preppy, but not in a way that makes me stand out now that new threats have been made. I don’t want to go back in the closet, but for three months, I can deal with it.”

“If Sam and I aren’t at the school anymore, the jocks will probably stop thinking about it. I’m the one they’ve been targeting for nearly six years. I’m the one turning jocks gay.”

Mrs. Anderson looked at Kurt like he was nuts. “You can’t be serious.”

He took his phone out and showed her what was written on his locker.

“How… never mind,” she said. “So, Blaine is willing to go to school dressed more casually and we’re just going to ride it out for the next week and see if once Kurt is gone the jocks let it go?”

“Well, the jocks that were caught putting the photocopies of the picture up will be dealt with for their bullying behavior.”

“Doesn’t Kurt and Sam leaving just embolden the bullies?” she asked.

“Yes, but there’s the fact that Kurt and Sam have already endured too much at their hands. Sam had to have surgery and months and months of therapy to regain the use of his hand. There comes a point at which those being targeted have to protect themselves while the ones committing the acts
of violence are sought, and hopefully brought to justice. And unfortunately, Blaine is in the gray zone.” She turned to speak to Blaine. “If at any point, you feel threatened, I will do everything in my power to get you moved to a new placement for the remainder of the school year, even if it’s homebound where you would basically do all of your work at home and a teacher would come to your house once a day to collect your work and grade it. Not the ideal way to finish high school, but perhaps better than changing schools again. We’ll cross that bridge if we have to. I’m going to go ahead and have you go to school so you’re not late. Please go directly to Principal Beiste’s office if anything problematic happens.”

Blaine nodded.

Kurt said, “You’re already friends with Puck. Ask him to stick close by. He offered to help protect me when the bullying was bad before. Also, do your best not to look afraid. Just go on like nothing has happened. If you start to look guilty or afraid, that’s not going to help you stay under the radar. Hopefully, the school will figure out who’s behind it soon.”

He nodded. “We’ll get going. Will you two be in Glee Club tomorrow morning?”

“Yeah. Principal Beiste is going to escort us in and out.”

He nodded and stood to put his coat on. The two of them left.

“I’ll get Mr. Sanchez to send you the next three days work by the end of today. And hopefully over the weekend he’ll have the rest ready. Do you have other questions for me?”

Kurt asked, “It’s not going to affect our ability to attend classes the third trimester at OSU Lima if we aren’t taking any classes at McKinley will it?”

“Not in your particular case it won’t. I’m going to discuss this with the Dual Credit Program director.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. The two of you are free to go home and get started on your Econ. Park in the teachers’ lot tomorrow morning and wait for Coach Beiste to come out.”

“We’ll do that,” Sam said.

They all left.

Sam drove them back to the house and Kurt called Carole to let her know what had been decided. They spent their time before they left to go to OSU reading Economics.

Principal Beiste met them in the teachers’ parking lot and walked in with them. She walked them to the choir room and left.

Kurt and Sam sat in the back row next to each other as usual. Once everyone arrived, Kurt got up and closed all of the doors to the room. He stood in the center in front of the piano and waited for everyone to quiet down. He spoke in a very quiet voice.

“I know that everyone is curious. Please excuse any unanswered texts or calls. Sam and I will be
finishing out Econ independent study. We will come to Glee rehearsals and then leave the school. You all need to go on as if nothing has happened. Making a big deal of it will just embolden whoever it is to go after other people. And yes, I’m letting them win this time. I’m tired of being the target. No, I will not be standing up for myself this time, nor do I want anyone in this room to go after anyone they suspect being behind it. If you have real information go to Principal Beiste so that the student or students can be expelled. You really need to zip it about this. It’s like psychopaths who get off on publicity and arsonists who show up to watch people react to the fires they set. Don’t be part of that. Just let it go. Sam and I will still be in Glee. We’re going to graduate with everyone. Just don’t talk about this."

Everyone nodded.

Kurt sat back down. He noticed that Blaine was in a chambray button-down and Levi’s. He had gotten a haircut and he had less gel in his hair.

Blaine stood up and spoke quietly as well. “Everyone in here knows that I’m gay, but I haven’t been publicizing it to everyone I meet. I know what happened to Kurt here last year. I’m not going back in the closet, but if anyone in here thought that now would be a good time to bring it up, I’d appreciate it if you didn’t. I’m not going to lie and deny it if I’m directly asked, but this is already my third high school. I’d just like to finish out the next three months and graduate in one piece.”

Puck said, “That’s cool, dude. We got it. Don’t tell, don’t talk about it. We’ve all seen what happened to Kurt, Sam, and Santana, and now Dave. We’ve grown up in the last three years. We can keep our mouths shut. I do have one question for Kurt.”

“Yes?”

“Is that why he threatened to kill you last year? You found out somehow?”

Blaine and several others turned and looked at him.

“Yes. Don’t bother asking how because that falls in the category of things I’m not going to discuss. Can one of you go look for Mr. Schue? How about Mike and Tina? See if he’s in Miss Pillsbury’s office or something.”

They got up to go see. Kurt got up and Santana followed. They got everyone to warm up. They did some stretches too. Kurt managed to get Blaine far enough away from everyone to talk to him quietly.

“I know you didn’t know about the death threat. They don’t know about the ….” Only a few people know about both. Keep it to yourself.”

“Got it.”

“I mean it. The last thing I need is for the people who are upset about this to know that THAT actually happened. My safety is at risk here.”

“I got it. I won’t say anything.”

Kurt went around the room working with other people to make his talk with Blaine look less conspicuous.

Kurt had Brad and the band start their “Fly/I Can Fly” mash-up. By the time they finished, Miss Pillsbury came into the room with Mike and Tina.
I’m sorry, kids. I don’t know where Mr. Schue is. I’ll stay in the room so you can continue to rehearse.” She leaned against the doorframe so she could see the hallway while still technically still being in the room.

Five minutes before the warning bell was going to ring, Principal Beiste showed up and escorted Kurt and Sam back out of the building.

Later that evening, Dave called Kurt.

“I won’t keep you, but you said you wanted to know what ended up happening.”

Yeah.”

“The two college classes I’m taking right now are pretty standard and I’m being transferred from the Lima campus to the main campus for the classes. I’m going to finish out the Econ class like you and Sam. I’m just going to send my assignments in through email from the OSU main campus. I’m just going to have to drive there on Tuesdays and Thursdays, so it won’t be too bad. When I pick classes for next trimester, I’m just picking whatever is best that’s offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Aunt Eunice helped me get new car insurance. Mrs. Huntington is very knowledgeable.”

“That she is.”

“Aunt Eunice says I can start looking for a job once I finish the high school stuff. I wish I knew if I got into any of the colleges I applied to. I’d just finish out these OSU classes and move to wherever I’m going to go to college and get a job there. I obviously still have a lot to think about. But four weeks and I’ll be done with the high school stuff and then I can leave Ohio if I want to.”

“It’s not the ending we wanted, but we’re surviving.”

Yeah. I’ll let you go.” He hung up.

Finn left for the last basketball game of the season and Kurt reset the security system afterwards. A couple of minutes later, the doorbell rang. Kurt looked out through the peephole. Sam came in from the kitchen.

Kurt turned and mouthed, “It’s the Karofskys.”

Sam went back in the kitchen turned the burners off.

The doorbell sounded again. Then the knocking started. Mrs. Karofsky said, “I know you’re in there. I want to know what you did to my son. He was fine. And now there are photos you kissing him and he’s gone.”

Sam walked up behind Kurt and wrapped his arms around him from behind. He propped his chin on Kurt’s shoulder and kissed his neck gently.

Kurt didn’t open the door, but he replied. “That is not me in those photos.”

“It most certainly is.”

“Actually, it’s not. I was at Breadstix that night at Sugar Motta’s Valentine’s party. You can ask
around if you want.”

Kurt couldn’t hear what was being said, but he looked out and it was just Paul standing on the porch.

“Look, Kurt, even if it wasn’t you, I want to know that David’s okay. His mother is distraught, not only because she’s found out that David’s gay, but because he’s gone. The police won’t do anything because he’s 18 and he left a note and took his stuff. Obviously, he wasn’t kidnapped.”

“I can’t get involved in this. Your wife isn’t the only one who thinks I turned Dave gay like I’m some kind of vampire or werewolf. It’s stupid. My life was threatened for turning David because the guy in the photo looks like me in the grainy phone picture that was printed on regular paper. I can’t even go to school anymore. I can’t be out after dark. If you want to talk to my dad, I’ll give you his number.”

“Sure.”

Kurt gave Paul Burt’s cell number. “Please try stop your wife from repeating the lie that I can turn people gay. It’s just ignorance and it’s a serious threat to me. I can’t go out to Finn’s last game tonight because of it. She can believe it is a sin or a moral failing or whatever, but please show her that it is not contagious. Stop blaming me. It could get me really hurt. She was upset that my ribs and wrist had been broken. I could end up a lot more hurt than that if the lies don’t stop.”

“I’ll do what I can.”

“You can call my dad and if he texts me and tells me to let you in, I’ll open the door.”

A few minutes later, Kurt got a text.

--I’m meeting him tomorrow morning. You can come too. Don’t open the door.

Paul said, “He said he’ll meet me tomorrow morning to talk. I’m walking away and leaving.”

Kurt turned in Sam’s arms and leaned in. He wrapped his arms around Sam’s waist and just stood there, breathing in his scent and centering himself. “I knew they’d come here eventually. I was just hoping it would be this weekend once Carole gets back and maybe Dad too.”

“Let’s go back and make dinner. I turned the heat off, but it’s all still sitting there on the stovetop.”

Kurt stood up straight and looked Sam in the eyes and smiled. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“Staying.”

“Always. We’re getting married, remember?” He ran his fingers along Kurt’s ribs just enough to make him squirm. He leaned in and kissed Kurt gently. “I’m not going anywhere.” He took Kurt’s hand and started humming “Happy Together” through the dining room. Once he had room, he started singing and spinning Kurt around the kitchen.

I can’t see me loving nobody else for all my life
When you’re with me, the skies’ll be blue for all my life
Me and you and you and me
No matter how they toss the dice, it had to be
The only one for me is you and you for me
Kurt was smiling and laughing at Sam’s antics.

Sam kissed him and said, “I love you.” right before he dipped Kurt, causing them to laugh even more. Sam managed to get them both upright again, which was no easy feat with both of them laughing.

“I love you too. Thank you. Laughing is good for us. Let’s finish cooking this stuff and eat.”

Kurt woke up to a slight knock on the door. He got up, slipped some pajamas on, and answered the door. Carole wanted to talk to him, so he followed her down the stairs to the kitchen, where Burt was waiting as well.

“So, we’re going to bring Paul here. I was thinking we’d go out, but that will just attract more attention than I want. I’m still not quite used to being a public figure. He’ll be here at 9:00. I just wanted to give you a chance to get ready.”

“Thanks. Do you not want Sam to be part of this?”

“That’s up to the two of you, but it was you that’s been accused of kissing Dave and turning him gay. You need to talk to him. Figure out what he wants to happen at this meeting. Lying for people is very dangerous.”

“I know. I’ll go call him and talk to him. I’ll be ready before 9:00.” Kurt went back upstairs.

He sat down on the bed and picked up his phone and called Aunt Eunice’s number.

“Good morning, Kurt.”

“Good morning, Aunt Eunice. May I please speak with Dave?”

“Sure. Just a moment.” She laid the phone down and called up the stairs for him.

A few minutes later, Dave picked up the receiver. “Yeah?”

“Sorry to wake you up. Your mother is the newest member of the ‘Kurt turned Dave gay’ group. She’s obviously seen the photo. She and your dad came over last night. She accused me of turning you gay.”

“Great,” his tone could not have been more sarcastic.

“So, my dad invited your dad over this morning at 9:00. I need to know what I can and can’t say because lying for you is a good way for this to all blow up.”

“Alright. Let me think.” There was silence for several minutes.

“It’s not going to take much for him to figure out that your threat last year was over this, not just regular bullying. Your mother may not put the two together because she is convinced that you are gay because I kissed you. But you kissed me. I need to know how honest I can be and how much you want me to withhold.”

“It doesn’t even matter any more. Just don’t tell my mom. Who did the initiating isn’t going to make a difference to her. You can tell my dad that I will email him in a few days and not to worry. I
“Okay. So, when he guesses what last year was about, I can confirm what he figures out?”

“Just not my mom. I need to talk to him. Maybe I could call from here, block the outgoing caller ID and you can put me on speakerphone?”

“Sure. He’s coming at 9:00.”

“Got it. Let’s just do that and you don’t have to be stuck in the middle.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll call back at 9:05.” He hung up.

“What was that about?”

“Paul Karofsky will be here at 9:00. My dad is here. They obviously got in after we went to bed.”

“Okay. It’s only 8:15. I want my cuddles.” Sam grabbed him and pulled him down in the bed and started to tickle him.

“Those aren’t cuddles. Those are tickles.”

“So they are…” He tickled him again. He kissed him on the forehead. “I want to sing you a song.”

“Okay.” Kurt scooted back up in the bed.

Sam got up and grabbed his guitar. He was still using the special picks Kurt had gotten him. He sat down on the bed and tuned his guitar and started to play. “The video was just released yesterday and I hadn’t heard it until then, but I had to learn it and sing it for you.”

When I look into your eyes
It’s like watching the night sky
Or a beautiful sunrise
Well, there’s so much they hold
And just like them old stars
I see that you’ve come so far
To be right where you are
How old is your soul?

Well, I won’t give up on us
Even if the skies get rough
I’m giving you all my love
I’m still looking up

And when you’re needing your space
To do some navigating
I’ll be here patiently waiting
To see what you find

’Cause even the stars they burn
Some even fall to the earth
We’ve got a lot to learn
God knows we're worth it
No, I won't give up

I don't wanna be someone who walks away so easily
I'm here to stay and make the difference that I can make
Our differences they do a lot to teach us how to use
The tools and gifts we got, yeah, we got a lot at stake
And in the end, you're still my friend at least we did intend
For us to work we didn't break, we didn't burn
We had to learn how to bend without the world caving in
I had to learn what I've got, and what I'm not
And who I am

I won't give up on us
Even if the skies get rough
I'm giving you all my love
I'm still looking up, I'm still looking up

Kurt had a few tears slipping down his cheeks. Sam reached out and wiped them away. He put his guitar back in the case and moved it out of the way. He got back on the bed and pulled Kurt into his lap. “Those are happy tears, right?”

Kurt nodded. “That was beautiful. Thank you. I won’t give up on us either.” Kurt wrapped his arms around Sam’s neck. “Do you want to be there for the meeting?”

“Yes. Even if I say nothing, I want you to know you’re not alone.”

“Okay. We need to get ready. I don’t think you in your underwear is going to go over well. Although, it’s a personal favorite of mine.” Kurt kissed him. He pushed him back onto his back and pressed in and licked Sam’s lower lip and was quickly met with Sam allowing the kiss to deepen. Kurt ran his hands through Sam’s hair. He kissed down Sam’s neck. “I love you.”

“I love you too, but this is going to end up in the opposite of us getting dressed.”

“You have the best ideas.” Kurt took his shirt off and kissed down Sam’s chest, intermixed with licking him.

“I’m going to need a shower if you keep that up.”

“Ooh, an even better idea.” He managed to keep kissing Sam here and there while undressing the rest of the way. “Shower time.”

At 8:55, Kurt and Sam put their dishes from breakfast in the dishwasher and sat down at the dining table waiting for Paul to arrive. When he rang the doorbell, Burt let him in and led him to the dining room.

“We can sit in the living room if you’d rather.”

“This is fine.”

They both sat down.

“We’re the only ones here. Carole dragged Finn out of bed and took him out for breakfast.”
Paul nodded. “This is why he threatened you last year. Somehow you found out. He threatened you to keep you from telling anyone. But his sudden change of heart last spring didn’t happen because of you. He wasn’t afraid of you. Someone else found out and he WAS afraid of that person. That person threatened him instead of the other way around. And that person scared him into apologizing and promising to not bully anyone.”

“He also changed for real,” Kurt said.

“If I had to place a bet, it would be on Santana,” Paul said.

Kurt said nothing. “These questions aren’t really suitable for me to answer. They aren’t about my life.”

Kurt’s phone rang. He checked that it said “unknown caller” and put the phone down on the table and switched it to speaker and answered it. “You’re on speaker.”

“Is my dad there?”

“I’m here, Dave. Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, Dad. Please don’t look for me. Don’t lead those jackasses to me. I wish you hadn’t gone to Kurt at all. They already think he has something to do with me being gay, which he doesn’t. But just trust that I’m okay. I’ll email you in a few days and we can keep in touch via email, but you can’t come looking for me. It’s not safe. Kurt’s not safe.”

“So, the picture of you that we’ve seen?”

“Was taken in Columbus on Valentine’s evening. That’s me kissing a guy who is not Kurt.”

“How long have you known you’re gay?”

“Several years. I kept thinking that I’d start to feel what the guys talked about and I did, but it was towards other guys. But I prayed and prayed. And I kept my head down and eyes to myself. And it didn’t go away. I never got interested in girls. I’m gay. I’m never going to be attracted to girls. I took the summer camp job to get away from the guys at McKinley. I didn’t want to be a part of that anymore. Mom’s never going to accept me. I’m not even going to bother trying to talk to her. All she will do is throw Bible verses at me and tell me how I’m going to go to hell if I don’t repent and find a nice girl.”

“Dave, I don’t want to lose you.”

“I can’t be in Lima. None of those guys can find out where I am. I need to finish school. I need you to tell Mom that the Hummels were of no help. Which is the truth. They aren’t going to help you find me. If she thinks they’re a dead end that’s for the best. She can’t keep saying that Kurt turned me gay. She’s going to get him hurt. Make her understand that.”

“I tried last night. She’s convinced that you were straight and you’ve been led into perversion.”

“Then stay away from the Hummels. I mean it. If Kurt or Sam gets hurt again because of me, I don’t know what I’ll do. I just can’t let that happen again. I’m going to hang up. I’ll email you like I said.”

“Don’t hang up. Is this why you threatened Kurt last year?”

“Yes. I outed myself to him and then I freaked out and threatened to kill him if he told anyone. I
knew Mom would send me away to a conversion therapy treatment center.”

“Someone else figured it out and blackmailed you. Was it Santana?”

“Yes. She caught me staring at a guy’s ass and she cornered me and told me that if I didn’t play
the penitent reformed bully that she’d tell everyone I was gay. And Santana’s not someone to
cross. She wanted Kurt to come back to McKinley. So, she blackmailed me into leaving him alone.
I was already going to leave him alone, but I had to also play her boyfriend because she had a
secret to hide as well, but that got blown out of the water last fall, leaving me without a girlfriend.
Anyway, I managed to make it to 18 without Mom finding out and forcing me into conversion
therapy. And then I got sloppy and ruined it myself. I kissed a guy in a gay club and one of the
jocks that graduated a few years back – his sister was there. She recognized me and texted him the
photo. And you know the rest.”

“How did you out yourself to Kurt? I doubt you just walked up to him and said, ‘Hey, Kurt, I’m
gay.’ Especially since you threatened him afterwards.”

“I was bullying him in the hallway. He followed me into the locker room yelling at me and
insulting me. He wouldn’t back down. I had a crush on him for ages and I just kissed him.”

Paul didn’t say anything at first. “So, you kissed him and the threatened him if he told anyone.”

“Technically,” Kurt said, “he threatened me if I told anyone else because I was stupid enough to
tell someone I knew that went to another school because I was really freaked out. So, because I had
already told one person, he believed it was probable that I would tell other people – people at
McKinley. I wouldn’t have because I know what the jocks will do to him, given a chance. He was
one of them. I never was. I was obvious. They kept themselves covered around me, but not around
Dave. They’re all going to act like he perved on them and they’re not going to take it well as
evidenced by me being threatened for turning him. So, before this, they had the ability to believe
that Sam had been converted by someone else before he came to McKinley. But they lashed out at
him and really hurt him when they got the opportunity. It will be worse for Dave. He’s known
them all for YEARS.”

“Dad, you need to leave. If you stay any longer, Mom isn’t going to believe that the Hummels
weren’t any help or didn’t have any information. Go home. Try to convince her to stop talking
about Kurt like he’s a vampire. Explain to her if he gets hurt, it will be partly her fault for
spreading rumors. Maybe that will help. And you can tell her that Kurt swore to you that he
NEVER kissed me because he didn’t.”

“Feel free to ask anyone who went to Sugar’s Valentine’s Day party if we were there. There’s
probably photos. I’ll see what I can find. I wasn’t where Dave was that night.”

“Dad, go. I’ll email you.”

“You’re sure that you’re safe.”

“I’m safe. I swear. I’m finishing school.”

“Okay. Email me.”

“I will.”

Paul stood up. “He’s right. If I hang out here, people will think you know something or are hiding
something. Dave’s 18. He has the right to go wherever he wants. I’ll go home and try to convince
Esther to stop spreading rumors. If you can find some photos of you at Breadstix, let me know
“I’ll see what I can find.”

Paul walked to the door and Burt let him out and reset the security system.

“Well, that was tough. Obviously, Sam already knew everything.”

“He did.”

“I’m going to find something mind-numbing to do for a bit. I need a break.”

“Wii Bowling is pretty fun,” Sam suggested.

Burt laughed. “I’ll think about it.”

When Kurt and Sam went back upstairs, they started on their Econ and then moved on to other subjects. A little before lunch, Kurt got an email with a detailed schedule for Econ. It had a lot of work listed on it, but he felt relieved seeing it written out rather than just wondering what all would need to be done.

“I think I’m going to suggest that Glee not meet for the two weeks between Regionals and spring break, if we win. We can resume rehearsals after spring break. That way we won’t be getting up and leaving and coming back. We can just get up early and stay here the whole time and focus on doing well on the Econ stuff.”

“Sounds like a plan to me.”

The group had worked hard and was ready to compete. They arrived at the school and loaded the bus with their costumes and the band gear they needed. Everyone filed in and they headed to Columbus. After they got there and unloaded, they changed and warmed up in the room they were given. The girls wore red dresses with black accents and the guys wore black pants, black shirts, black vests and regular red ties.

They went out to the audience to watch part of the competition. The Warblers were up first. Sebastian led both of the songs they sang. He had pushed them even farther than Kurt had managed to the year before. Their choreography was in synch and really well done. They used the whole stage area rather than sticking mostly to staying on the risers. They sang “Stand” and “Glad You Came”.

Finn was up on his feet a few lines into “Stand” and everyone else in the New Directions got up to cheer them on too. When they finished they all clapped and Sam blew Sebastian a big kiss and made him laugh.

A madrigal choir and a couple of others performed after the Warblers, but instead of watching, the New Directions went back to warm up again before going backstage. When the curtain came down and the stage had emptied, the 12 girls took their places on the stage and when the curtain went up, they sang “Stronger (What Doesn’t Kill You)”’. Santana and Mercedes absolutely nailed it.

The four Cheerios that decided not to participate in the group number exited the stage during the lights out and the 8 guys entered. No one had challenged Santana for the spoken word solo and
Tina had the female lead. Blaine did the spoken word part and Artie had the male singing lead. Finn and Rachel were also featured throughout the song. They pulled the mash-up off perfectly.

Last in their set was the guys’ song. They opted to go with something to give the Warblers a run for their boyish charisma and sang “One Thing” by One Direction, which was new enough and popular enough that everyone in the audience recognized it and they were up on their feet bopping along. It featured Kurt, Puck, Sam, Mike, and Rory as the five One Direction leads with the other three guys singing back up harmony the whole time. It definitely got the crowd enthusiastic. When the curtain went down, they didn’t have to wait long to be named the Regionals Champions. They were headed to Chicago in May for Nationals.

After the competition, Kurt, Sam, and Finn didn’t ride back with the New Directions. Kurt had let Trish drive his Navigator to Columbus. The four of them, along with Nick, Jeff, Sebastian, and Dylan met up with Burt, Carole, Mark, Liam, the Duvals, and the Sterlings to go out to dinner as a group. After they ate, the parents left Columbus. The 8 teens stayed behind and went to play laser tag and do an escape room challenge together, which they succeeded at. Afterwards, they went their separate ways back to Dalton and Lima.

Sunday morning, Sam woke up first and he wrapped himself around Kurt and mostly lay on top of him.

“Sam?”

“Mmm hmm?”

“Not that I mind, but why did you just turn on your octopus snuggle mode?”

“Ah, this is just slightly past octopus snuggle mode. It’s octopus entrapment mode.”

Kurt kissed him. “Sweetie, I love you. You don’t have to entrap me to get me to snuggle or cuddle with you.”

“Oh, but you see, this is designed to keep you in the bed all day.”

“You know that I have to work on my costume.”

“I know. But I want you in bed with me all day. Can’t blame a guy for trying. We scheduled Sundays for snuggles and they keep getting canceled. I’m just frustrated.”

“Me too. The extra Econ work combined with my NYADA audition this Thursday and Regionals yesterday and rehearsing every morning before school last week. But for the next two weeks, there’s no Glee rehearsal. Rachel’s going to use the time during first period on Monday and Wednesday to practice in the auditorium. Blaine is practicing Tuesday. I’m going to just go in Thursday morning before school. Tina, Mercedes, and Brittany agreed to be my swans.”

“The outfit is super sexy. I think you should wear it Thursday night when you get home.”

“I can do that.”

“Will you dance for me?”
“If you want me to.”

“Definitely.”

They cuddled and kissed for a while before Sam let Kurt out of bed so he could sew. He made them breakfast and brought it up, and then he worked on schoolwork, but kept stopping to kiss Kurt when he’d switch books.

Around lunchtime, Kurt finally finished all of the Velcro. “Done. Now to try it on and see how to get it off quickly and with the most pizzazz and flare.” Kurt got up and put the tux on. The first few times he tried it, the jacket was really problematic.

“Would you mind making us lunch too? I need to figure this out.”

“Sure.” Sam went downstairs.

Kurt eventually figured out exactly where to grab the jacket so that when he pulled on it came off quickly. He put the song on and played the beginning several more times and worked until he got the timing right. The last thing he needed to be able to do was to pull the tux off while singing. After a little adjustment to his movements, he managed to get it down. He practiced until it became second nature.

After they ate lunch, they went back to their Econ work.

“You know this supply and demand stuff doesn’t work for snuggles,” Sam said, as he leaned toward Kurt and kissed his neck.

“Nope. Not at all.”

“The ‘demand’ level stays high all the time regardless of the ‘supply’ and I really, really want to snuggle and make out. Can we take a break, please?” He ran his thumb across Kurt’s lips.

Kurt kissed it, and shut the book and put it on the floor. He slipped his pillow down in the bed, lay back on it, and said, “I’m all yours.”

Sam didn’t want to wake from his most realistic dream. He barely peeked out under his heavy eyelids to see Kurt wink at him with an impish grin on his face before he went right back to what Sam had thought was a dream.

A few minutes later, Sam still hadn’t quite managed to catch his breath. Kurt placed tiny kisses all over him. “Happy Anniversary.”

“Well, that was a very enjoyable wake up.”

“I knew you’d like it. Good morning, sweetie.” Kurt sat up straddling Sam and ran his hands down Sam’s arms and interlaced their fingers. “I love you.”

“I love you too.” He scooted up in the bed and repositioned himself a little bit. “Scoot closer. Like we used to when I couldn’t put any weight on my hand or foot.”

Kurt repositioned himself and got on his knees in front of Sam and braced himself by putting his hands on the headboard. Sam ran his hands down the back of Kurt’s thighs.

“Yeah. Just like that.”
After several rounds of celebrating their love for each other, they took a nap because they were pretty wiped out. After they woke back up, they showered, celebrating once more, and then went downstairs to eat breakfast.

After breakfast, they put their responsible student hats back on and worked on schoolwork. They went to their OSU classes and ate lunch together afterwards. Kurt went to work. Sam went to his Acrylics classes and stayed for part of the studio time for the class afterwards. He went home for a bit before he went to pick Kurt up.

When Kurt got off, he ordered Thai food and they picked it up on the way home. He had gotten Trish to invite Finn out for the evening and convinced Carole to give them some alone time in the house since they couldn’t go out after dark still.

Kurt put out some candles and lit them and they ate dinner by candlelight in the dining room. They had rearranged their schedules so they wouldn’t have to do any schoolwork after dinner.

They showered quickly when they went upstairs after dinner because Kurt felt grimy from work. Sam had taken the space heater up to their room before he went to get Kurt. He turned it on so the room would warm up on his way into the bathroom. When they got out, they laid their massage blanket out and gave each other massages. They snuggled up afterwards.

Sam said, “I know we talked a lot about this Sunday night, but if you’ve changed your mind, it’s okay. I won’t be upset.”

“I haven’t changed my mind. There is no one else in the world I would want to do this with.” He rearranged himself and straddled Sam and leaned forward and kissed him. “I love you and if you want to stop at any point, we will.”

Sam pulled him back down and kissed him. “I love you too. And there’s no one else I would want to be with either.”

They ended up showering again and getting back in the bed to snuggle more. Kurt was the big spoon. He had his arm under Sam’s pillow and Sam had reached up underneath it and was holding his hand. Kurt’s other arm was under Sam’s and draped across his chest where he was tracing random patterns with his fingers. He placed tiny kisses on the back of his neck and across his shoulders. He pulled his arm back and ran his hand down Sam’s side to his thigh and left it there, gently petting him.

Sam pushed back with his butt and Kurt scooted back toward the center of the bed a bit. Sam turned over in his arms and kissed Kurt. He wrapped himself around Kurt. “I love you. That was perfect.”

Kurt giggled. “It was wonderful, but perfect?”

“Every time will be perfect because it’s us.”

Kurt kissed him. “You’re such a sweetie.”

“I mean it. Us giving ourselves to each other is perfect, even if we don’t get every little tiny thing
“to go exactly as planned.”

“So, when you were discussing all of the possible permutations…”

Sam laughed. “Umm hmm. This option is definitely on my yes list. How about you?”

“Definitely yes. And the other way is on my list for day after tomorrow. After my NYADA audition.”

“I’d be up for a repeat after while.”

“Really?”

“Mmm hmm.” He kissed Kurt again working his way from his lips to his ear and then down his neck.

Kurt and Sam arrived Thursday morning and were escorted into the auditorium. Principal Beiste sat down. Rachel and Blaine arrived about a half-hour later. By the time they arrived, Kurt was already in his breakaway tux and only Sam knew what he had on underneath. When the other three girls arrived, Kurt only practiced the vocal part of his audition. He gave Rachel and Blaine a chance to run through their songs as well. He had stretched before he got dressed, but he stretched again.

Miss Pillsbury escorted Madame Tibideaux to the auditorium. She sat at the table and got a notebook out. She didn’t waste any time and called Blaine to the stage.

He walked to the center of the stage and introduced himself. “I’m Blaine Anderson. I will be performing “Piano Man” by Billy Joel and “Something’s Coming” from West Side Story. He sat down at the piano and began to play and sing. His voice was strong, but Kurt could hear a little bit of nervousness. When he finished he moved to the middle of the stage and sang “Something’s Coming”. He performed it the way he had for his West Side Story audition.

Madame Tibideaux sat unmoved and devoid of emotion on her face during both of his songs. She said, “Thank you, Mr. Anderson.” And then she looked down to write some notes.

Blaine exited the stage and sat down not far from where Sam was sitting.

Rachel’s name was called next. She moved to the center of the stage. “My name is Rachel Berry and I will be singing “Don’t Rain on my Parade” from my favorite musical Funny Girl and a song called “Get It Right” that I wrote last year. The music started and she belted out one of her best renditions of “Don’t Rain on My Parade” that Kurt had ever heard her sing. When she finished, she moved back to the center of the stage and nodded slightly for Brad to start the short piano intro. She sang the song even better than she had the year before during Regionals.

Madame Tibideaux continued to sit unmoved and devoid of emotion on her face during both of Rachel’s songs, but when she finished, Madame Tibideaux said, “Thank you.” She wrote some notes again.

Rachel smiled and nodded before exiting the stage.

Kurt’s name was called. He moved to the middle of the stage like the other two had. “My name is Kurt Hummel and I will be singing “Bridge Over Troubled Water” by Simon and Garfunkel and “Not the Boy Next Door” from the Peter Allen bio-musical The Boy From Oz. He walked to the
piano, sat down and began to play. His voice soared and he let the emotion of the song flow through him. When he finished, he stood up and let Brad take his place at the piano. He moved to the front of the stage. At the phrase “underneath, there is somebody new”, he pulled the tear-away tux off and tossed it off stage to reveal the long-sleeved, black, fitted button-up shirt and the gold lamé pants he had on underneath. He danced his way back to the piano, on top of it, in front of it and all around the stage. He had kicks and turns and a fair bit of hip movement. He ended the song by hitting a G5. When he finished, he nodded, briefly making eye contact.

She had remained stoic during his performances as well, but she stopped his exit by speaking.
“You know Hugh Jackman won a Tony Award for playing Peter Allen?”

Kurt nodded.

“Hugh trained with me the summer I was in residence at the Sydney Opera House, and I’m certain that he would have been as impressed with what you did with that song as I am. A bold choice, young man. I congratulate you for taking such a risk today.”

Kurt half bowed and said, “Thank you.” He blew a kiss to his swans. He turned back and nodded again to Madame Tibideaux, repeating “Thank you” as he exited the stage.

It didn’t take long for Sam to get back stage. He wrapped his arms around Kurt and picked him up, spinning him around. He was nearly silently super enthusiastic. “You were amazing!” He put him down and kissed him. “Get changed so that Coach Beiste can walk us out.”

Kurt spoke directly into Sam’s ear. “Tell me that you got that part she said about me at the end.”

“Of course.”

He continued to speak so that only Sam could hear him. “The fact that she said something nice to me is like gold. She’s notoriously hard to please. I’ll go change.”

Sam went with him. A few minutes later, they returned to the auditorium. Sam was carrying Kurt’s costumes in a garment bag. Principal Beiste stood when she saw them come in. She accompanied them out to the parking lot.

“That was some singing you did in there,” she said.

“Thank you,” Kurt responded. “The best part was what she said. She’s not one to give compliments easily.”

“She seems very intense.”

Kurt laughed. “Good word. Thanks for walking us out. We’ll see you next Thursday.”

She nodded.

They got in and she waved as they pulled out.

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Kurt was on a performance high still. He was undressed and had undressed Sam and had gotten them both in bed before 9:00. He had Sam pinned down and was kissing him everywhere he could reach. Kurt flipped them. “Just go slow.”

“I will.”
“We have time to switch,” Sam said. “Please? We can take a quick shower when we’re done and be like regular college students and show up in sweats.”

“You’re way too hard to say no to. You know that, right?”

Sam kissed him. “That means yes, right?”

“Yes.”

“I feel like I’m doing the walk of shame. Slipping in the back door, sitting in the back row, wearing a hoodie.” Kurt opened the classroom door and they found seats quickly and sat down. Kurt took his notebook out and started to take notes.

Sam put his hand on Kurt’s thigh, and then changed his mind and put his arm around Kurt’s shoulders instead. He started running his thumb back and forth across the top of Kurt’s shoulder. He looked over and Kurt was smiling. Sam winked at him.

Kurt gave him “the look” and then purposefully looked at the instructor and the whiteboard, not quite succeeding in suppressing the smile on his face.

Once class ended they had to part ways for their second class, but they met back up for lunch. Sam plopped down in the chair next to Kurt.

“Have I told you how gorgeous you are lately?”

“Mmm. Not since about three hours ago.”

“Well, that’s entirely too long ago.” Sam kissed him on his neck below his ear. “I’m ready for it to be time to go home.” He pulled their food out and put it on the table.

“Four more hours. We can make it.” Kurt opened his bowl and started to eat his salad.

Sam started to eat as well. “I don’t want to go home and do schoolwork though.”

“Me neither, but we have just one more day of these classes and our exams next week. And next trimester we’re taking fewer classes since we won’t have Econ left to do at McKinley. Trying to stuff it all in so quickly has fried my brain. I’m ready for a break.”

“Well, we get that soon. Spring break is in 8 days.” He leaned over, blocked his mouth with his hand, and whispered, “I still get the reprise of the gold pants tonight, right?”

Kurt laughed. “Of course.”
“We’re here. I’m so excited!” Kurt said. They hadn’t taken any luggage, just carry-ons, so they made their way the Metro to take the subway to Burt’s apartment.

“Me too. I can hear the space museum calling my name.”

“As soon as we drop our stuff off at the apartment, that’s exactly where we’re going.”

When they eventually made it to the apartment, Kurt unlocked the door and opened it, letting Sam walk through first. He closed and locked the door behind him.

Sam said as he looked around. “This place would actually be perfect for the two of us.” He went and looked out the patio door.

“It would. I can’t wait until we can get our own place.” He wrapped his arms around Sam from behind.

Sam turned in his arms and kissed him. “Not that much longer. We have 8 weeks until Nationals and 9 until graduation. And then two more weeks after that and our OSU classes will be done.”

“We’ll be at home all summer. And then off to college.”

“It’s exciting and a little scary. But we’ll be together.” Sam rearranged his arms a bit and held Kurt tight to his chest and spun them in a circle.

Kurt laughed. When his feet were back on the floor, Kurt kissed him. “Let’s go.”

“One more kiss.”

Kurt smiled and kissed him.

“This is SO cool! I don’t even know where to look first. There’s so much to see.”

Kurt reached for his hand and pulled them to the side of the area. “Let’s look at the map I picked up and just pick a place to start.”

Sam looked at it. “Let’s just go left and go around the whole level counterclockwise.”

“Works for me.”

After they had made it about two-thirds of the way through the first floor exhibits, they hit the food court.

“I’ve never eaten at Boston Market,” Kurt said. “Want to try it?”

“Sure. We can eat McDonald’s or pizza any time.”

Once they sat down with their food, they started to eat and talk.

“The chicken pot pie is good. Here, try a bite,” Kurt said, as he turned his fork toward Sam.
He leaned forward and took the bite. “It is.” He took a bite of his sweet potatoes and then the
creamed spinach. “Is turkey expensive or something?”

“No, not really, why?”

“I’m really liking this Thanksgiving vibe. Turkey and sweet potatoes in March. Sweet potatoes are
supposedly really high in vitamins. I think we should get some and cook them ourselves and buy
turkey more often. It’s delicious.”

Kurt smiled. “We can do that.”

“I love those original airplanes. Those guys were nuts. Absolutely nuts, but they did it.”

“I know. I look at them and think that there is no way I would get in one of them. But the old space
suits gave me that same feeling. They hardly seemed space worthy. They look so low-tech.”

“1903 to 1969. It was just 66 years between the Wrights managing to fly their plane a little over
100 feet and the lunar landing. It’s been a little over 40 years since the moon walk and we have a
space station with people living on it. And a bunch of stuff that was part of Star Trek back then is
part of everyday life now. It’s wild how fast things have progressed in barely more than 100
years.”

Kurt pulled his phone out. “We’ve got 15 minutes before our Imax movie starts.”

“Okay. I have a question. If I got one of those patches in the gift shop, would you sew it to my
messenger bag? I’m thinking it would be cool to get one when we go places. I could order one
online from New York. And then I could get one in Chicago when we go. It would be like this
really cool look and it would remind me of the fun stuff we’ve done.”

“Sure. I can sew them on. It’s actually a really cool idea.”

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When they left the museum, they walked the half-mile to meet Burt at his office. They walked
through the exterior section of the US Botanic Garden and crossed the street to see the Bartholdi
fountain along the way.

Burt was just coming out of the building when they walked up. “Hey, boys. Did you have a good
time?”

“It was great!” Sam exclaimed. “Have you been in there?”

“Not yet.”

“You HAVE to go.”

“That good, huh?”

“Better.”

Burt smiled at him. He knew how much Sam like sci fi and space stuff. “Ready to head to the
store?”

Kurt said, “Sure. You’ve got a list, right?”

“I do. We just need to walk back to the Metro. We’ll take a cab back to the apartment after we
finish. I know it’s only a few blocks to the apartment from Costco, but I’m buying everything for the whole week so we don’t have to go back again and you know how Finn eats.”

“You can go change. Sam and I will get dinner started.”

“Thanks, kiddo.”

“Before you go, is there some particular way you want this stuff put in the cabinets?”

“Nah. However you do it is fine. If Carole doesn’t like it, she can rearrange it when she gets here Tuesday. I just open the cabinet and fridge and eat what I find.”

Kurt laughed. “Sounds like Finn.”

Burt left to change. Kurt and Sam organized what they had brought back and put it all away. Sam got to work on making the turkey burgers that were on the list for dinner. Kurt washed and cut up the extra vegetables for their salads. It didn’t take too long for everything to be on the table. Burt came back out and sat down with them.

“So, what’s on the agenda for tomorrow?”

“Well, if you’re up for it, we found a spy museum. It’s not free like all of the others, but we thought it sounded pretty cool.”

“Alright. I can do a spy museum.” He took a bite of his food. “This is good. Thanks for cooking for me. Food always tastes better if someone besides me makes it.”

Kurt rolled his eyes and shook his head. “You’re welcome.”

“So, you two finished up all your finals then, right?”

“Yeah,” Sam said. “We did our Econ final yesterday and the OSU finals earlier in the week. I’m glad it’s over.”

“We took too many classes to try to stuff all of Econ in as well, but we did it. All we’ve done for weeks is schoolwork. We’re definitely ready for this vacation.”

“This next trimester, Kurt’s only taking three classes and I’m taking those three plus a painting class. I have the painting class and the time I spend in the resource area and the art studio during the time that Kurt’s at work. I still have to figure out how to get a job.”

“Oh. I forgot to tell you. Ethan’s leaving as soon as school ends. His wife moved to Dayton this past week. He’s only staying for the kids to finish this year out where they are. He’s taking them to Dayton on the weekends.”

“So I can work at the shop again?”

“Yep. You can start when school lets out. Doing the registers, clean up, moving the cars in and out of the bays, and oil changes. I’ve been working with Finn on the tire changes. He’ll be working part time just doing those. That way I can keep my mechanics working on things that require more training.”

“Thank you! That will make things so much better. I’ve been doing everything to keep my expenditures low, but I’m so relieved.”
“So with all these college classes you’ve been taking, will that cut down on how long it will take
you two to finish college?”

Kurt answered, “Either that or it will let us take fewer classes per semester. That would allow me to
work still if I need to and it will give Sam more time to get his coursework done, if he needs it. I’ll
have 48 credits counting the 9 this next trimester.” He paused and calculated. “Sam will have 37.”

“And how many do you need to graduate?”

“Around 120,” Kurt said. “What Sam and I did is not typical, at all. Usually high school students
just take one or two dual-credit classes. It was our issues at McKinley that allowed us to take more
since having us off campus was better for everyone involved.”

“I see. But it’s still a really good program. McKinley should make sure that students know about
it.”

Sam said, “I agree. The support at OSU Lima is so much better. The classes might be harder in
theory because they involve learning more material, but they’ve been really good at supporting me
with the help I need, whereas McKinley did nothing. You saw Kurt tutoring me on the weekends
last year.”

“Yeah. I’m glad this option exists. I’ve enjoyed having Kurt back at home this year.”

“Me too,” Sam said.

Burt laughed at him. “Yeah, kid. I know. You two are good together.”

When they finished eating, Burt said, “You two can clean up while I head down to the fitness room
to walk on that damn treadmill. I promised Carole I would walk on it for an hour every night that
she’s not here to go for a walk with me.”

“Okay, Dad.”

Kurt washed the skillet and cutting board while Sam loaded the dishwasher. They grabbed their
toiletries and pajamas from their bags as quickly as they could and headed to the shower together
while Burt was gone.

“I didn’t think we’d get to shower together tonight.” Sam kissed Kurt and started to wash his hair.

Kurt did Sam’s as soon as he rinsed his own hair. “I think we’re limited to our hands unless you
want to live through him teasing us when he gets back up here.”

“Your hands are perfect. Scoot closer.” Sam kissed him.

By the time Burt was back up from the fitness room, Kurt and Sam were sitting on the couch
watching TV in their pajamas.

“We thought we’d get our showering over with so you could take one when you got back up here if
you wanted to. I know you said you go to bed earlier here because of the commute and needing to
talk to people in the mornings sometimes. But if you stay up on the weekends, you can find
something you like and we can all watch it together.”

“Yeah, sure. I’ll go shower and we’ll watch something.”
As soon as he shut the bedroom door, Kurt sat in Sam’s lap and kissed him. “I had a great time this afternoon.” Kurt leaned forward and put his head on Sam’s shoulder and kissed Sam’s neck gently as they held each other.

“I had a lot of fun too. One thing kept popping into my head besides spaceships and airplanes.”

“What’s that?”

Sam leaned up and kissed Kurt, moving from gentle to passionately quickly. When they separated to catch their breath, he said, “About how we could get married here, like this week.”

“I thought we were going to wait until we graduate from college.”

“I know, but I’ve never actually been anywhere with you where we could actually get married. We weren’t old enough and New York hadn’t passed the legislation yet when we were there last May. But here it’s completely legal and were both old enough and I love you so much. This afternoon when I’d hold your hand and feel your ring, it just made me think about how we could actually get married here.”

“I love you too. If you want, we can talk about it. We could come back when we’re done with school, like mid-June. I wouldn’t want to do it this week because your family wouldn’t be here. Your family could drive here. It’s probably 8 hours like it is from Ohio. Maybe your parents could switch off driving, four hours each and leave after work on a Friday. We could have a ceremony Saturday morning, and then maybe go to the zoo as a huge group instead of having a reception. And they could spend the night here, even though it would be a little crowded. And they could drive back on Sunday. And we could go to a hotel somewhere and stay for a few days before we go back to Lima.”

“That could work.”

Kurt leaned into kiss Sam again. “Bas, Dylan, Jeff, and Nick could stay in a hotel.”

“They could. We could also get married here officially at the courthouse or wherever and then actually have a wedding ceremony in Ohio. There’s no rule saying we can’t hold a ceremony. Then no one would have to drive so far.”

“That’s a better idea.”

“What’s a better idea?” Burt asked.

Kurt scooted off of Sam’s lap and sat next to him as he answered. “To get married here in DC and then have a ceremony in Ohio instead. So the part here would be the legal part, but the ceremony could include people we want to celebrate with us without having to figure out how to get them all to DC.”

“Makes sense to me. It would certainly cut down on everyone’s expenses and save a lot of time traveling.” He picked up the remote and started looking through the Netflix options. He searched for a spy show. “What about this? Chuck? I’ve never watched it, but it looks like it’s been on for four or five seasons. Must be decent.” He clicked on it.

They watched two episodes, and then Burt stopped it. “Well, it’s funny. It’s a little far-fetched, but I liked it.”

“I love it,” Sam said. “How have I missed knowing about it? I’m definitely watching the rest of the episodes.”
"We can watch them while we’re waiting for *Warehouse 13* to have new episodes in July," Kurt said. He looked around the room again. "I like the layout of this place. It’s really compact and uses the space well. And the balcony is really nice. It makes it feel less like living in a box."

"Carole liked it the best of the places we looked at that were within walking distance of the subway lines to the airport and to the Capitol Building. I just can’t justify spending money on a taxi to and from the Capitol Building every day. Especially not on top of the crazy rent in this town. You’d be shocked at the prices."

Kurt said, "Probably not as shocked as you think. Remember that I did all that research on New York City."

"That’s true. Well, I’m going to sleep."

"'Nite, Dad."

Kurt and Sam pulled out the sofa bed and put the bed linens on that were waiting on top of the dryer.

“How upset do you think Burt would be if we sleep without our shirts on?”

“I don’t think he’ll care. Guys walk around with their shirts off all the time.”

“Good. I can deal with the pants, but I really like sleeping without a shirt.”

“Do you want to go to sleep or watch something else?” Kurt picked the remote up when he turned the lamp off. He put his pillow up against the back of the couch and sat at the head of the bed.

He leaned over and whispered, “Play something we’ve watched before. Turn it down enough to keep from bothering Burt, but up enough that it covers over the sound of us kissing.”

Kurt laughed. He played a random episode of *American Idol*. He repositioned his pillow, lay down, and faced Sam. “How’s that?”

Sam kissed him instead of answering.

After Burt left for work, Kurt and Sam folded the sofa bed up, put the sheets and blanket in the washer, but didn’t turn it on. They headed into the bathroom and took their time showering together before they got ready. When they came out they tossed their washcloths and towels into the washer as well and started it. They made breakfast, cleaned up, moved the stuff from the washer to the dryer and started it.

Kurt started a playlist on his phone. He took Sam by the hand and stepped in to his arms and began to dance around the room. About a half-hour later, they heard a key in the lock. Kurt pecked Sam on the lips and stopped the music. They stepped away from the door and let everyone inside.

“Good morning, boys,” Carole said cheerfully.

“Morning. We have banana muffins and milk for the weary travelers,” Kurt said.

Finn said, “You’re the best brother ever. I’m sorry for everything mean I ever did or said.” He walked past the kitchen area, sat down at the table, reached for a muffin, bit half of it off and
chewed it up.”

Kurt offered him the first glass of milk, which he guzzled half of, followed by stuffing the other half of the muffin in his mouth. The rest of the glass of milk vanished just as quickly.

The dryer buzzed. Kurt handed the gallon of milk to Sam to take over breakfast duty while he folded everything in the dryer. Trish, and then Carole used the bathroom before joining Finn in sitting down and eating the muffins.

“Finn, honey. Slow down. Kurt and Sam didn’t make the entire dozen just for you,” Carole chided.

“Sorry. They’re really good.” He slid the plate towards the center of the table. After his fourth one and second glass of milk, he got up and went the bathroom.

Trish said, “Thanks for making these. They are really good.”

“You’re welcome.” Kurt closed the laundry closet doors after he finished stacking the folded bed linens. He had the towels and wash clothes in his hand, waiting for Finn to come back so he could put them in the bathroom.

Finn came back out and sat down and ate two more muffins and a third glass of milk. Kurt put the towels away. Carole and Trish ate three muffins each and drank a glass of milk. Sam put what was left of the milk back in the fridge.

“This apartment is very compact,” Trish said. “It’s got everything you need, and it doesn’t really feel closed in since the kitchen, dining area, and living room are all open and the big patio door and windows at the end let a lot of light in.”

“We looked a quite a few. This one was the least expensive and with the best features. I like that I don’t have to use a laundromat. And this great room or open-living concept does keep it from feeling confined like it would if there were walls. The others had built-in islands that had room for two barstools, but I like eating at a table. Plus, I liked the center space empty since the kitchen area is already quite small.” She got up and put the plate and her glass in the dishwasher. “Is everyone ready to go?”

Everyone nodded or said ‘yes’.

“Let’s head out then. It’s still a little overcast, but the weather said it’s going to clear up the rest of the way and be at least partly sunny.”

Kurt and Sam put their jackets on and they left.

Kurt said. “We checked. It’s the yellow line to the end, and then we can hop on a bus or walk the last mile to the zoo.”

Trish said, “This is my first time riding the subway.”

Sam said, “Well, it’s a lot fancier than the subway in New York.”

“I actually like it,” Kurt said. It really does speed up a commute with being able to avoid traffic.”

Kurt made sure to take a picture of Trish when they were waiting for the train and after they got on.

“So where all have you been?” Carole asked.
“We went to the aviation museum when we got here Friday. Saturday we went the spy museum with Dad. Sunday, we got him to go with us to the American history museum. He liked the area on cars and transportation the best, of course.”

Sam said, “Yesterday, we went to the natural history museum. I definitely recommend that. I know you two aren’t as into space stuff as I am, but the natural history museum has all sorts of cool things.”

Finn said, “Like what?”

Kurt answered, “Huge dinosaur fossils. You’ll like it.”

“We’ll check it out,” Trish said.

The five of them opted to take the bus the rest of the way to the zoo. They started at the south end of the zoo where they got off the bus. They walked through the lower zoo. Sam and Kurt held hands as they entered, but it didn’t take long before Kurt and Sam had their arms wrapped around each other as they stopped to watch each group of animals. They saw the lions, tigers, apes, wallabies, and looked through the reptile area. Kurt winked at Trish when he saw her she slip her arm around Finn’s waist and step closer to him so he would put his arm around her shoulders. He got a good picture of the two of them kneeling near one of the wallabies.

They continued north into the upper zoo, following the Asian trail and saw the elephants, bison, giant pandas, red pandas, all the birds in the bird house, and the leopards. They circled back on the other trail through the upper zoo and saw the cheetahs. Before they left the area, they stopped for lunch and looked through the gift shop. Trish bought herself a teal hoodie with a wallaby on the front. When they came out, she took the hoodie she had on off and put the new one on instead. She put the other one in the small backpack she was wearing. She reached for Finn’s hand again once she finished.

They walked past the bison and elephants again as they headed into the valley area. They saw the elephants from that trail as well. They saw bald eagles, pelicans, sea lions, seals, otters, beavers, and bears on their way through the area. They stopped for quite a while at the tank with the sea lions and played with them by moving their hands along the tank and walking along the window. Kurt and Sam stood so that the sea lions were next to them and Trish took their picture. They went into the Amazonian exhibit, which was like a small zoo all on its own. It had birds, turtles, fish, caciques, monkeys, stingrays, and other exotic inhabitants.

The petting zoo was their last stop before they left the zoo. It only had alpacas and koi that weren’t traditional farm animals that they had all seen before. Kurt got Carole to stand next to one of the alpacas and took a picture because it was so cute. They took a group selfie next to the zoo sculpture sign before they got back on the bus.

They took the bus back to the subway, and then took the subway to the stop closest to the Capitol Building. Carole texted Burt when they came up out of the subway. He met them out front and took them in the building. He gave them a tour and showed them his office. He got one of his aides to take a few photos of the six of them together in his office. He took them over to the Capital Building and they walked through the exhibit areas and took a brief tour into the House Chamber.

When they finished, they went to a bowling alley that had been recommended to Burt. It was completely different than the bowling alley in Lima. It was decorated more like a night club with its neon decorations and completely hip vibe. They got shoes, picked balls, and Trish put all of
their names in. Sam came in last place since he had never tried bowling left handed before. Burt beat all of them, with Kurt coming in second.

They turned in their shoes and sat down and ordered dinner. Kurt and Sam wanted to try the cauliflower crust veggie pizza that had bell peppers, red wine mushrooms, sautéed onions, roma tomatoes, and a four cheese blend and the Cubano sandwich, both things they had never tried before. Burt and Carole ordered a BBQ chicken pizza. Finn ordered a Bring Da Heat burger and a basket of onion rings. Trish decided to go out on a limb and try the Caribbean jerk chicken sliders. They had the jerk chicken, avocado crème fraîche, mango salsa, and napa cabbage on Hawaiian rolls. Everyone enjoyed what they ordered.

After they finished eating, the four teens played a round of skeeball. Kurt and Sam couldn’t continue to play because needed to go back to the apartment and pick up their stuff to catch their flight. They said their goodbyes, and the two of them left. They took the subway back to the apartment, grabbed their bags, and went back to the subway station to get to the airport.

They browsed through the shops in the airport while they waited to board. Kurt picked up a cherry blossom magnet and bought it to put on their magnetic wall since they both had really loved how beautiful the area looked with the cherry trees in bloom.

They arrived at nearly midnight. After they rode the shuttle out to the parking area, they got in the Navigator and drove straight from the airport to Sam’s family’s house. Dwight was waiting up for them and let them in when they got there at nearly 1:00. He pulled Sam into a hug.

“Sorry about keep you up so late, Dad.”

“It’s alright. Getting to see you makes it worth it.” He shook Kurt’s hand. “It’s good to see you to, Kurt.”

“You too.”

“Stevie and Stacey are both in her room. You two can sleep in Stevie’s room. We both managed to get tomorrow off, but the kids went to bed on time, so they’ll still get up early. I’m going to head to bed.”

“’Night, Dad.”

Kurt and Sam showered quickly and went to sleep as well.

Saturday morning, Sam had been lying completely still letting Kurt sleep since, but once he started to stir, Sam said, “So…”

“So?” Kurt scooted back and moved Sam’s hand so it was on top of his heart and he put his over the top.

“I need a magic wand.”

“You and me both. What for in particular?”

“Well, I want to use it like Mickey Mouse in Fantasia. I want to enchant everything to clean itself.”

“I see. Otherwise known as you’re not in the mood to do laundry or chores today.”
“Bingo. What I want do to doesn’t involve any clothes at all.”

“Umm hmm. We’ll we’re off to a good start then.”

“That’s true.”

“And we could always do the things that involve no clothes before we wash clothes or while we wash clothes or after we wash clothes since everyone else is in DC still.”

“Or all three.” Sam started kissing down Kurt’s neck to his shoulder, and then he propped up on his elbow to reach more areas to kiss.

“Well, since you’re the one with all the ideas, I think you should be the one to plan today’s activities.”

He kissed Kurt on the shoulder. “I’ll be right back.” He grabbed what he needed out of their dresser and got back in bed.

Later that afternoon, Kurt’s cell phone rang. Sam paused the book they were listening to and Kurt answered the phone. It showed unknown name as the caller.

“Hello?”

“Hey, Kurt.”

“Dave?” Kurt flipped to speaker.

“Yeah. I just called to tell you that I’m all set up here in Columbus now. I found a place that rents furnished rooms to students. So, I have my own bedroom that locks, but then I share the bathroom and other areas of the house. It’s not ideal, but it’s just for a couple of months. I moved in this morning. I signed up for four classes this trimester to make the most of my time. Oh, yeah. I did get a job at McDonald’s. Also, not ideal, but money is money.”

“That’s true.”

“I went through all of my stuff. I bought a couple of large storage totes and Aunt Eunice is letting me keep those in the upstairs closet until I figure out where I’m going after this. Like everyone else, I’m waiting to see where I get into college. I just wanted you to know that everything’s all clear for all of you to visit Aunt Eunice again. I know that Finn was kept out of the loop so he couldn’t accidentally give away my location.”

“Thanks for letting me know. Hopefully, the place your at will be decent for a couple of months.”

“It’s a 10 minute walk to campus. It’s definitely better than the hour commute I had from Aunt Eunice’s place. And it’s only $200 a month. The room is barely bigger than a closet, but it’s what I can afford right now, so I’ll deal.”

“I’m glad you found a place you can afford.”

“I’ve been emailing my dad, so he’s stopped searching for me. I’m not telling you my cell number so he can’t come around again and try to press you to give it to him. But I did leave it with Aunt Eunice in case of an emergency. You can call her and she’ll call me.”

“Okay. How are you doing?”
“Aunt Eunice was actually really good at helping me deal with a lot of stuff. And I’m seeing a counselor on campus once a week. I won’t keep you. Thank for everything. If you hadn’t given me a way out, I don’t know what I would have done. Nothing good. That’s for sure.”

“Well, I’m glad you’re figuring things out. Thanks for letting me know.”

Dave disconnected the call.

Kurt put his phone back on the side shelf and scooted over and curled back into Sam’s side.

“Well, that’s good,” Sam said. “I have no interest in him being a part of our lives, but I’m glad he didn’t do anything permanent. It’s super hard for me to have any sympathy for him. The one thing I do feel bad for him about is that his mom won’t accept him. The rest, not so much. He hurt you and terrified you for ages and he outed himself to you, and threatened to kill you over something he had done. Even if he didn’t mean it, you didn’t know that. And he outed himself by kissing whatever his name is in a gay club, which if you’re trying to stay in the closet, isn’t a good place to be spending time. If he didn’t want people to know, he wasn’t really doing a very good job of it.”

“I feel bad for him for the same reason – his mom. It’s not likely to change either. And not having any support is really hard. I kept it to myself, even though everyone suspected, even my dad. He’s come around a lot. Even a month before the two of us started dating he was being ridiculous. You saw how he reacted to my kilt last May. The year before found my tiara collection and took my Navigator away until I promised not to wear long sweaters. He hasn’t always been a beacon of acceptance. If he had been, I would have told him before I was 16 that I was gay. I’ve known back as far as I can remember. My mom never pushed gender roles on me. When she would read me stories, I’d ask about finding a prince for myself. She never acted like that was anything out of the ordinary. My dad played tea party with me and things until I was maybe 10 or so, but then he wanted me to sort of grow out of it and be more like a guy. Anyway, I know what it’s like to live in fear that you’ll be thrown out. So, I do feel bad for him. But you’re right that frequenting a gay club isn’t the way to stay in the closet.”

“I’d be more likely to feel bad for him if he had just minded his own business and then this had happened. But he bullied you and hurt you and that makes me pretty much hate him. So, anything nicer than hating him is the best I can do.” Sam leaned down and tipped Kurt’s chin up and kissed him. “No more talk about him. Just us and the people we love and like.”

“Okay. It’s a little after 6:00. Do you want to go make dinner?”

“Peanut butter boyfriend sounds pretty tasty.”

Kurt laughed. “Is this dish similar to sundae boyfriend?”

“Pretty much. But chocolate peanut butter boyfriend might be even tastier.”

“You’re such a goof. But that was fun.”

“I liked the ‘Love Graffiti on Sam’ project.”

“My next project is actually making the gun holster for your Mal costume. I know it doesn’t show when you have the coat on, so the outfit looks complete right now, but I would still like you to have the holster and the gun too.”

“Most cons won’t let me take a gun in, but I bet I could make one out of foam or clay or something and only make half of it. You know, the part that sticks up above the edge of the holster. That way, it can be removed and shown to security that it doesn’t even look like a gun when it’s out of the
holster.”

“Well, once I get the holster done, you can start working on the partial gun prop to go in it.”

“Sounds good to me. I’m not sure I’m ready for so many people to come over tomorrow. I like it quiet with just the two of us here. I had a great time in DC with you. And then going to the aquarium with my family was fun. And of course Jungle Jim’s was fun on the way to Columbus. And I liked spending the day in Columbus with Nick, Jeff, Sebastian, and Dylan. You getting called into work all day yesterday, was not what I had planned, but at least I still got to spend the day with you. What prompted Finn to invite all of the New Directions over tomorrow?”

“I think it just hit him that we don’t have much time left as a group.”

“Do you think we’ll go to Aunt Eunice’s for Easter?”

“I don’t think she’s particularly religious, but I vote yes. It can just be for fun, not for a religious celebration. I say we take Trish too. We could invite Sebastian and Mark and Dylan and Liam. We could take tents and the adults could sleep inside and we could all camp out.”

“Let’s talk to Carole about it tomorrow because it sounds like a lot of fun.”

“Carrots, celery, cauliflower, broccoli, red peppers…” Kurt moved stuff around in their cart. “No grape tomatoes. Do you want those?”

“I love them, but we can skip them since they don’t work on subs. The veggies are mostly for us and for Rachel. I think Mike eats them too. But most everyone else will eat the junk food.”

“Do we want tomatoes we can slice for the subs?”

“Yeah.” Sam reached over and looked through the choices and grabbed a bag of tomatoes. “Let’s go grab the buns and bread.”

“And a big pack of lunch meat. Supposedly people are bringing sub ingredients. Let’s hope.” Kurt moved everything to the section of the cart under the seat and put the bread in the seat. “Alright. Now, we’re ready to go get everything on Carole’s regular shopping list.”

They spent the next half-hour collecting up everything else. Once they had it all, they got in line. They ended up in line behind Miss Pillsbury.

“Oh, good morning, boys. You’re out shopping early for a Sunday.”

“We’re having all of the New Directions over for the day. We’re out getting supplies and Carole’s regular stuff too.” Kurt noticed she wasn’t wearing her engagement ring when he leaned over to help her by getting the box of paper towels out from under her cart for her.

She saw him notice. “Um, yeah, so I’m sure you know the reason, but I’m not going to share it with anyone. Can you not say anything?”

“Sure. And do I know the reason because of Finn?”

She nodded quickly. “Mmm hmm. I know you can keep things to yourself. He was let go. We found a replacement who will start tomorrow. Unfortunately, his replacement is not interested in sponsoring Glee Club.”
“I see.”

Sam said, “What about you? You’ve always seemed to care about the club. Or was that more because of Mr. Schue?”

“Well, yes and no, but I don’t know anything about music.”

Kurt said, “That doesn’t really matter. Last year, we sang the same songs, plus one new one for Nationals. We can do the same this year. We already have three songs. We could just meet once a week and practice them until the week before Nationals and then we could rehearse three times or something.”

“I can do that, but I have to find two more people to go to Chicago with us. Part of Will’s probation last fall was because he went to New York and let you all wander around without supervision.”

“What about Principal Beiste?” Sam said.

“Maybe. I’ll see what I can do. I’ll come tomorrow morning and tell everyone. You don’t need to be the bearers of bad news.”

Kurt said, “It seems to me that it shouldn’t be your job either. If he’s being let go for disciplinary reasons, it seems to me that he should make a personal appearance and own up to what he did. Adults mess up, but the right thing to do would be to apologize or at least let everyone see that actions have consequences, sometimes years later.”

Sam agreed, “All you’ll be able to do is say ‘I can’t say why, but there are real reasons.’ That doesn’t help anyone. I get that you can’t say anything, but Kurt’s right. He should come in and tell us himself.”

The cashier was waiting on her.

She paid quickly. “I have to go. I have to … I just have to go. I’ll see the two of you tomorrow.”

Kurt and Sam reloaded their cart and paid. They didn’t start to talk again until they were outside loading everything into the back of the Navigator.

Sam said, “Well, that will put a dampener on everything tomorrow.”

“It will, but what he did to Finn was wrong. And she’s right about us being left completely unattended in New York. You were 18 and I almost was, but Tina, Artie, and Rachel were just 16. Everyone else was 17. Even if I was allowed to leave with you since you were 18, no one else should have been able to leave the hotel without a chaperone. And you know that he walked past me and a group of people getting dumpstered on a repeated basis. He never actually apologized to me.”

“Yeah. I know.” He grabbed the empty car and pushed it over to the cart corral. He climbed in and they headed back to the house.

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When they pulled up, Carole, Finn, and Trish had just parked. Finn and Trish carried their bags in and then came back out to help Kurt and Sam bring things inside.

Sam went upstairs and changed his shirt. He had worn the rooster shirt he made to school several times, but since they were there for such a short period of time and always sat in the back, no one
had ever noticed it. He came back down into the kitchen to help prep the vegetables.

“Oh, my God, Sam! That shirt is fantastic,” Trish said. “Did you make that or buy it?”

“I made it.”

“Well, it’s great.”

“Thanks.”

“How should I cut these peppers?”

“In rings and then in half. That way people can put them on their subs if they want or they can dip them like the carrots and celery.”

“Got it.”

Sam mixed up the two dips, one ranch and one vegan. He put them in bowls with lids and put them in the fridge.

Finn had been staring at Sam’s shirt since Trish made a big deal about it. “Okay. I give up. I don’t get it.”

“What’s the word for a male chicken? Those are not girl chickens on his shirt.”

“A rooster?”

“Another less refined word,” Sam suggested.

“I guess I don’t know,” Finn said.

“A cock,” Trish supplied.

“Oh. I guess I knew that. I just didn’t think of it. So, cocks…”

“Rock,” Sam said.

Finn changed the subject and turned back to Trish. “So this is the first time you’ll meet everyone. If anyone starts to be too nosy or they’re not being nice, just go find Kurt and stand with him because none of them have the nerve to hassle someone with Kurt standing with them. He has the best drop dead look I’ve ever seen.”

“I’m sure I’ll be fine, but I’ll keep Kurt in mind as my secret defensive weapon.” She kissed Kurt on the cheek. “I’m pretty good at the drop dead look myself.” She tipped her head down slightly, looked up, rotating her eyes slightly to her left and raising an eyebrow.

“Oh, wow. That’s the best imitation of Kurt’s drop dead look that I’ve seen. Very scary. Don’t use
“I didn’t need to learn it from Kurt. It’s reserved for catty girls who think they can make me feel inferior because I am not a rail thin supermodel who wears a size 4.”

“And you sound like him too.”

“He’s my long lost brother. We’re ying yang soul twins.”

Sam and Kurt laughed.

Finn said, “Well, I have no idea what that means, but you three seem happy about it, so I’m good.” He wrapped his arms around Trish from behind.

She turned and looked up and kissed him. “He’s a slightly feminine guy and I’m a slightly masculine girl. I just made up a bunch of mumbo jumbo. That’s why they laughed. It’s not supposed to mean anything. I was just being silly.”

“Ohay. And I don’t think you’re slightly masculine. You’re sporty and beautiful.”

“And you are sweet.” She turned and kissed him again.

Kurt asked, “So where all did you decide to go?”

When Santana and Brittany arrived, Kurt stopped Santana by grabbing her wrist gently and leading her to Burt’s office. He shut the door behind them and leaned against it. She sat down in a chair.

“Why are you taking me to an interrogation room? Are we having a murder mystery dinner and I’m the one getting killed?”

“No, but I haven’t hosted one of those in a long time. Maybe I should host one again.”

“Sure, but I want to be the murderer at the next one.”

“Fine by me. I brought you in here for two reasons. First off, Finn’s girlfriend is here. Do not lay into her. No jokes at her expense. You and I have come to a truce and I’m asking you to extend it to her. Everything that Finn has done to hurt you has nothing to do with her and she doesn’t deserve to have her boyfriend attacked in her presence over something she had nothing to do with.”

“That’s fair enough. I’ll keep any snide remarks as mere thoughts.”

“And don’t tease her either.”

“Why would I tease her? Does she have bigger tits than Dolly Parton or something?”

“No. She’s a basketball player. She’s the same height and build as Sam.”

“Ah. Fine. No Amazonian jokes. What’s the second reason?”

“Mr. Schue got fired. He won’t be there tomorrow. You and I need to be strong and keep the group in line tomorrow morning when Miss Pillsbury tells everyone.”

“So, we’re not going to Nationals?”
“I asked her to be our sponsor. I told her that we can sing the three songs we sang for Regionals and meet once a week until the week before Nationals.”

“Okay. Yeah. I’d rather do that than not go. I’ll fake being stunned, and then we can take control of the room when everyone loses it because God knows Miss P will struggle to get everyone to calm down.”

“She has to find two more teachers will to go with us to Chicago. I suggested Principal Beiste.”

“I’ll twist Coach Sue’s arm if I have to. I know things.”

“You know a lot of things. Oh, and Dave’s okay. I talked to him yesterday. He’s renting a room where he is and he got a job. He finished his Econ class like Sam and I did.”

“Well, that’s good news at least. He and I did actually become friends. We’re a lot alike. Only he didn’t end up with the guy he had a crush on. Brittany’s the only really good thing in this whole fucked up town and she loves me and that’s what gets me through some days. And you’re not entirely lame.”

“Gee thanks.”

“So, leave Finn’s new girl alone. Shue is gone. Dave’s okay. Anything else?”

“Finn’s ‘new’ girl has been his girlfriend for four months. They’re serious. No fighting, no break-ups. It’s not like he was with Rachel or Quinn.”

“Well, good for him. I’ll be nice. I promise.”

“Thank you. Let’s go.” He opened the door and let her out.

Santana followed Kurt into the kitchen. Sam walked towards Kurt when he saw him come in.

When she saw Sam’s shirt, she said, “That shirt is awesome by the way.”

“Thanks.”

Puck came in from the half bath behind them. “Move so I can see his shirt.”

Santana walked around Sam and went to look for Brittany. Kurt walked over toward the food.

“That’s great. I’ve seen it from a distance, but I guess I never looked at it carefully. None of the teachers did either, obviously. So, is he a wildcat in bed?”

“I’m pretty sure that’s not a soup question.”

“What?”

“It’s a quote from a Sean Connery movie that means ‘none of your business.'”

“Right.” Puck grabbed for his hand. “Dude, what’s this?” He looked up. “Kurt, jazz hands, let me see them.”

Kurt stopped what he was doing and splayed his fingers and put his hands out to his sides. “Why?”
“Why are the two of you wearing matching rings on your left ring fingers?”

Everyone that could hear what Puck said moved to look at either Kurt’s or Sam’s left hand.

Brittany answered, “Because they’re engaged.”

“Since when?” Mercedes asked.

Santana said, “Mmm. Three and a half months ago or something.”

Mercedes said, “So who all knew?”

Sam said, “Our families and Trish. Brittany figured it out a while back and told Santana.”

Brittany spoke up again, “It’s not like it was a secret. They’ve been wearing the rings since right after Sectionals. You all just don’t pay attention to important things.”

Tina said, “Did you set a date?”

Kurt shook his head. “Not yet. It’s not legal in Ohio. Depending on legislation and stuff, it could take forever for it to be. If it’s not by the time we’re ready, we’ll go some place it is.”

“We need details,” Mercedes said. “Who asked who and where?”

Sam answered, “Kurt asked me here at home. It was just the two of us.”

Kurt said, “There’s nothing more to tell. Let’s eat.”

Kurt moved out of the center of the crowd and went back to Burt’s office for a few minutes. Sam saw where he had headed and eventually made it through the group and out of the kitchen to follow him. He knocked and Kurt opened the door.

“Hey, sweetie. Come in.” Kurt pulled him in and closed the door and locked it.

“Is everything okay?”

Kurt leaned against him and wrapped his arms around him. “I just needed a break for a second. I was feeling a little tense.”

Sam kissed him and stepped forward causing Kurt to back up until he was against the door. Sam kissed down his neck and said, “Taking a break is fine. How about a kissing break?”

“Sounds perfect.”

Sam leaned in and kissed him again. He started humming “Happy Together”.

Kurt took a deep breath. “I am happy with you. Very happy. It was just the indignation that got to me. Most of them haven’t really done much of anything with us and for them to get aggravated was annoying. We’ll go back out and see if they have nice things to say. If they say any negative things, I might just go upstairs. I’m not in the mood. I’ve had a great spring break this year with you. And I want to end it on a happy note.”

“Me too.” He gave Kurt one more quick kiss. “Let’s go get something to eat.”
Rachel managed to get Kurt alone. “So, Finn’s still seeing her?”

“Yes. They’ve been together the whole time since Thanksgiving like I said before. And they were casually dating before that. I’m not sure exactly how long. A few months.”

“And you and Sam are engaged. Did he apply to schools in New York City as well?”

“He did.”

“Oh. I had been thinking we could get a 2-bedroom place to cut down on expenses, but I guess we’d need a 3-bedroom place if Sam’s coming to New York as well.”

“Did you think I would share a room with you or with Blaine? Or are you and Blaine planning to share a room? Never mind. If Sam and I end up going to school in New York, we’ll be living alone. I’m not interested in being sexiled in my own home.”

“I won’t be sexiling anyone.”

“You say that now, but once you meet a guy who loves what you do, you’ll be swept off your feet.”

“So, you’ve been swept off yours it seems.”

“Or I swept him off his.” He changed the subject. “Did you apply to other schools in York City?”

“No. NYADA is it for me. Blaine applied to NYU in addition to NYADA.”

“Well, there’s not much longer to wait to find out – less than three weeks.”

“And you’re sure about you and Sam?”

“Why do you keep asking me the same question in different ways? What is it that you are hoping to gain from asking?”

“You two don’t seem to have much in common, yet you’re both of the mindset that you are well-matched for each other. You repeatedly reminded me that Finn and I have little in common, and you insisted that because of it we were not well-suited for each other. I don’t understand the difference and even a few minutes ago, you mentioned me finding someone with similar interests and him sweeping me off my feet.”

“I understand what you’re getting at now. You and Finn are not a good match because you don’t view him as an individual that brings something to your relationship on his own. You see him as your partner. Your singing partner, your dancing partner, your partner for events. You don’t see him as a person on his own. You don’t value his input or his insight. You speak over him and correct what he says. In a group conversation, you never give him the opportunity to voice his opinion. You don’t listen when he talks. Maybe he speaks a little slower than you do. Most people do. He knows fewer words than you do. Also not something unusual given your large vocabulary. But you have a real knack for making him feel stupid. He’s not stupid. The reason I said that about finding someone who likes the same things as you is because you really seem to be unwilling to step outside of your Broadway mindset and learn something about anything else. You change every conversation back to something about yourself or musical theatre or Broadway. You’ll need to find a man whose interests revolve around those same things or you’ll never have anything to talk about. Be honest, if I got Finn to come over here right now and the topic of Trish, Glee Club, graduation, and the previously mentioned musical theatre topics are excluded, what would you talk to Finn about?”
“College plans?”

“Nope. That’s part of graduation. No school related topics. What topic could you hold a five minute conversation about with Finn?”

She sat and thought for a few minutes. “I guess I really can’t think of anything.”

“Sam and I sat around yesterday relaxing most of the day between doing laundry and chores. We talked all day long. Hours. And we just spent the whole week together 24/7 during which we talked a lot.”

“What do you two talk about?”

“Everything. Art, science, music, movies, TV shows, books, traveling, philosophy, current world events, world views, belief systems, history, speculative science like science fiction stuff – all sorts of stuff.”

“Oh. That’s a lot of different topics.”

“It is. Does that help you understand the difference between why Sam and I work as a couple and why I can’t see you and Finn working as a couple?”

“I guess so. I need to think more. I did go back to the counselor. It does help.”

“Good. I need to go upstairs and check on things.”

She nodded.

He went up to the kitchen.

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Kurt got upstairs to be faced with Blaine as the only person in the kitchen.

“Hey, Kurt.”

“Hey. How’s school been? Any personal trouble since Sam and I quite attending class?”

“No. I haven’t had any trouble. I stick around Rachel most of the time.”

“That’s good. She just told me about her idea of getting an apartment with you in New York. She seemed to think I’d be going without Sam.”

“She’s been talking about the three of us. I just assumed that she knew something about Sam that I didn’t – like he had his heart set on going to school somewhere not in New York City.”

“I got the impression that she thought that I would be willing to share a room with you. I’m not sure what kind of impression she’s given you, but if she’s been giving you some sort of indication that Sam and I might not be in this for the long haul, that is a figment of her imagination and didn’t come from anything that Sam or I have said to her. The engagement is for real. Sam and I will choose programs that best suit our needs in an area where we can live together.”

“She did seem to be under the impression that you and Sam wouldn’t make it past the end of high school because you were fundamentally too different from each other to weather the storms of post high school life together. Or something like that. But I noticed the matching rings the day we were at the district office to meet with Mrs. Huntington. I just didn’t say anything.”
“Well, as I said, I just don’t want you to have some false impression that I am going to break up with Sam after graduation. If we end up in New York, we’ll end up in some walk-up shoebox efficiency somewhere up five flights of stairs or something. But it will just be the two of us.”

“I see. That makes sense. Like I said, I just got the impression that he wasn’t going to be part of your living situation in New York.”

“I’m glad things are going smoothly. There’s 9 weeks left. I hope they continue to be smooth sailing for you.”

“Yeah, me too.”

Kurt turned at went into the laundry room. He gathered up the clothes they had hung to dry the day before and took them upstairs. Once he was in their room, he texted Sam and told him where he was. He got the ironing board out and started to iron. See the wrinkles coming out of the shirts always soothed him in a way. He focused in on the task and cleared his mind as much as possible.

A little less than three weeks later, Kurt and Sam brought the mail in when they came home. Kurt looked through the stack and pulled out a couple of envelopes and put the rest in the basket on the table by the door for Carole to sort through.

“Finn?”

He didn’t get a response. Kurt texted him. He came up from the family room. Kurt met him at the top of the steps.

“There’s a letter here for you.”

“Thanks.” Finn took it from him. “It’s an acceptance or rejection letter. I haven’t opened any of them yet. Trish is bringing hers over in just a little bit. She’s opening them with her dad, and then coming over.”

“Okay. We’ll be upstairs.”

They closed and locked the door behind them when they went in. Kurt put his bag down on the table and Sam sat his in one of the chairs. Kurt grabbed their other letters from earlier in the week and sorted them, handing Sam his. Kurt took his shoes off and plopped on the bed. Sam took his shoes off, pushed his pillows up against the headboard and leaned against them.

“So?” Sam asked.

“So, we open them.” He got back up and grabbed his letter opener. He quickly slit the tops of the envelopes open and handed the opener to Sam, who did the same. “Which ones do you want to look at first?”

“The ones from here in Ohio.”

They pulled out the letters. They had each applied to one more school in Ohio.

“I got in,” Kurt said.

“So did I, but no financial aid offer beyond what I’d get based on income.”

“Me either. Let’s look at the New York ones.”
They pulled the letter out of one each.

Kurt said, “I got into the SUNY branch I applied to, but no scholarship offer.”

“Same for me,” Sam said. “My other letter is from a different SUNY program.” He pulled it out. “I got into it as well.”

Kurt pulled his letter from NYADA out. “I got in.”

“Wow. Kurt, that’s amazing.”

“No financial aid offer though, so it’s way out of my budget. But it’s amazing to know that I’m good enough to get in.” Kurt folded his letters and put them back in the envelopes. He got up and put them in the folder with his other two letters.

Sam’s phone rang. He reached over and picked it up. “Hey, Nick. What’s up?”

“Did you guys open your letters?”

“I’m going to put you on speaker, okay?”

“Yeah.”

“We opened them. What about you guys?”

“We did. Have you made up your minds?”

“We just finished opening them about two minutes ago.”

Nick laughed. “Okay. We won’t rush you. Let us know after you decide.”

“We will.” Sam disconnected the call. He picked his letters up and put them on the dresser. “Come up and sit next to me, okay?”

Kurt got up and propped his pillows up too and sat next to Sam. “Why does it have to be so hard? There isn’t really a question about where we’re going. We’re going where we both got scholarship offers. They’re good programs. Maybe not THE best, but good. NYADA only takes 20 musical theatre majors per year. There are a LOT more people working on Broadway than 20 people, so those other people either went to school someplace else or they didn’t go to school at all. Either way, NYADA might be great, but a degree from there isn’t the only ticket to working on Broadway.”

“That’s true. It’s still really cool that you got accepted.”

“It is.”

“Are we going to tell people where we’re going?”

“I don’t know. I’m not ashamed. I’m just not interested in hearing how I’m making the wrong choice. If I am, I am – and I’ll have to live with the consequences. I just can’t see how working full time every summer, working 15-20 hours a week during the school year, plus my dad’s contribution all going toward the cost, only to graduate with $200,000 in debt makes any sense when with the scholarships and what my dad will contribute, I can graduate owing nothing, and so can you. We can start our lives after college debt free. That sounds so much better to me. What if we want to live in Seattle or Miami or Quebec?” He laughed. “We could do any of those if we finish school without 10 years of debt.”
“You’re very persuasive and passionate and I love you.” He pulled Kurt’s hand up to his mouth and kiss his knuckles. “Do you want to call your dad and tell him? I’m going to call my parents and tell them.”

Kurt nodded and reached to grab his phone. He took it in the bathroom so they could both talk at the same time.

“You got scholarships? Honey, that’s great news. We’re so proud of you.”

Sam heard Stacey in the background. She grabbed the phone. “You and Kurt didn’t have the ceremony without me, did you?”

“No, Stacey.”

“Mommy and Daddy are really excited and Mommy’s crying. I just wanted to make sure. Why is Mommy crying?”

“She’s happy. I’m going to get to go to college in the fall.”

“Oh. Okay. That’s nice I guess.”

“It is. I’m very excited too.”

“I’m glad you’re happy about it.” She handed the phone back.

Mary said, “I wrote the name down. I’m going to look the school up. We’re so proud of you.”

“As long as you’re sure that going there is what you want, then I’m all for it,” Burt said. “Thanks for calling. I’m going to let you go. Finn’s calling in on Carole’s phone.”

“Talk to you later.” Kurt hung up and went back out into the bedroom. “Did you tell them?”

“I did. They were really excited. Stacey thought maybe we had the ceremony without her because Mom and Dad were excited and Mom was crying.”

“Aww, poor little thing.”

“She’s taking this wedding thing very seriously. She was like ‘Oh, I’m glad you’re happy about college’, but she was quite indignant at first when she thought we’d had the ceremony without her.”

Finn knocked on their door. Kurt got up to open it.

“Hey, Finn.”

“I just wanted to tell you that Trish and I both got into Dayton and Toledo. We’re going to look at both schools carefully again and pick.”

“That’s great, Finn. Congratulations!”

“Yeah, thanks. I’m still sort of in shock that I got in both places. Did you guys pick?”
“Yes, but we’re not telling anyone just yet.”

“Okay. We’re going to watch a movie, unless you had already planned to.”

“Nope. That’s fine. I think we’re going to finish up our schoolwork if we can so that we can have the weekend free.”

Finn headed back downstairs. Kurt shut and relocked the door.

“Let’s get that lab written up. I have other things I’d like to be doing.”

“Oh, really?” Sam asked. “Like what?”

Kurt climbed onto his lap and whispered in his ear. “Like me giving you a massage, and then you giving me a massage.”

“Just massages, hm?”

“Well, very, very thorough massages.”

“How I am supposed to concentrate on writing the lab up now?” Sam asked.

“Motivation. The sooner we stick the data into the form where it goes and get it printed, the sooner I can stick…”

Sam kissed him. “Mmm hmm. I get it. Get your computer out. I’ll get the handwritten data sheet out.”

Santana stood up after everyone had arrived in the auditorium. “Okay. Listen up. We’re going to go through our songs for Nationals and then we’re going to discuss Senior Skip day. Places!”

Everyone moved to their places on the stage and they ran through their set once.

“That was sloppy,” Kurt said. “We’re getting complacent. The lack of stress of trying to focus to get everything right when we’ve learned everything at the last minute is working against us. Rather than perfecting it, we’re just going through the motions.” He turned to the audience. “Miss Pillsbury, can you stand up in the fourth row and record us this time? Your phone is fine. I’m not concerned about the audio quality.”

“Sure, Kurt.” She moved. “I’m ready.”

Santana spoke up. “Kurt’s right. We look lazy. This time with energy and focus. Everyone can watch the video later and figure out how to improve their own performance. Places!”

Their second run-through looked better. Once they finished, they sat down on the risers.

Santana started. “So, Senior Skip Day ideas.”

Puck said, “A theme park. A lot of us have never gone to one.”

“Cedar Point or Kings Island?” Kurt asked.

“Which is better? Has anyone been to both?” Tina asked.
Kurt said, “I looked them up. From what I saw, Cedar Point has more roller coasters. Kings Island has more of a variety, but I could be wrong. That was just the impression I got from looking at the websites. Look them up yourselves for a few minutes.”

“King Island is a lot less if we buy tickets online,” Tina said. “Plus more variety is better. Some people don’t like roller coasters.”

Puck said, “The water park doesn’t open until the end of May, so that kind of sucks.”

“We’re looking at going a week from Friday. I don’t think it will be warm enough to want to get in the water anyway,” Quinn said.

Puck asked, “Why are we going early?”

Kurt said, “For one thing, no one is out of school then except college students, so hopefully the lines won’t be very long. And the other issue is that we’re going to Chicago the following week and the week after that is graduation. So, it’s early or not at all. We could see about going to a theme park in Chicago though. We’d be chaperoned though and have to stay together the whole time.”

“Yeah, ix-nay on the chaperone,” Puck said. “Let’s go to Kings Island then. We need to carpool though because parking is $12 for each car.”

“Does anyone have an SUV besides me?” Kurt asked.

Sugar said, “My mom does. I could drive it.”

“That will work,” Santana said. “Two SUVs will hold all of us. So, we’re settled then. May 11th we’re all going to Kings Island. Kurt and Sugar will drive. Moving on to Prom. I have the song list.” She walked to the edge of the stage. She handed out a sheet with the songs on it. “Here’s the order. Stay here and we’re practicing. Wherever we have to stop to go to first period, we’ll start with the next song tomorrow before school.”

Kurt and Sam didn’t take a sheet and got up to leave.

Tina said, “Hey, wait. Why are you two leaving?”

“We’re not singing with you or going to Prom. I don’t want a bodyguard standing next to us all evening. I can’t be in the building without an escort. Sam and I are going to Prom at Dalton.”

Mercedes said, “At Dalton?”

“Yeah,” Sam said. “Officially, I’m Nick’s date and Kurt is Jeff’s date. It’s the same night as Prom here. We have friends at Dalton too. It’s better than not getting to go to Senior Prom at all.”

Tina said, “You’re right. I hope you have fun.”

“Thanks. I hope all of you have fun too,” Kurt said. “We’ll see you next Monday.” Principal Beiste walked them out of the building.

“You two do realize you all just discussed skipping school with me in the room?”

Kurt laughed. “I know, but you’re cool. You were a senior once too. You’re not going to do anything about it.”
“You have a lot of confidence in that statement,” she teased.

“We’re all coming down with the flu on the 11th. We’re going to be good students and prevent it from spreading to the rest of the school by not coming that day.”

She just laughed at them. “See you scoundrels next Monday.”

Tuesday morning, Kurt woke up when Sam stirred and moved closer, wrapping himself around him.

“Octopus snuggle for your birthday?”

“Mmm hmm.”

“I was going to get up and make you breakfast.”

“Uh uh. Snuggles and cuddles.” He pulled Kurt even closer.

“You don’t want a birthday breakfast in bed?”

“Mmf. Birthday cuddle in bed.”

Kurt moved Sam’s arm so he could place gentle kisses down his forearm on the underside where it was really sensitive.

“Mmm. Kissy cuddles.”

About 10 minutes later, Kurt’s phone pinged. He reached back and grabbed it to read it. Carole wants us to come downstairs in 15 minutes.

Sam rolled onto his back. “I have just the perfect thing to do during that time.”

They cleaned up and got dressed and went downstairs. They walked through the kitchen into the dining room. Burt, Carole, Finn, and Trish were sitting at the table. Kurt joined in the singing too.

Happy Birthday to you!
Happy Birthday to you!
Happy Birthday, dear Sam.
Happy birthday to you!

“Thank you. I didn’t expect a breakfast birthday party. And Trish even came. Thanks.”

Carole said, “I texted Kurt when Trish texted me that she was on her way.”

They started passing the platters around.

“It looks great.” He put a little of everything on his plate as the platters got passed around.

After they had all eaten, Sam opened the cards that were sitting by his place at the table. The first one was a card from Finn and Trish that had a piece of paper folded inside. He unfolded it.

Finn said, “We know you haven’t been to the Cincinnati Art Museum and right now the special
exhibits are a Picasso and a Monet exhibit and even as little as I know about art, I know those dudes are like super awesome painters. So, we got you two tickets for those special exhibits. You’ll have to go either this weekend or next weekend though because those exhibits end the 13th.”

“That’s really cool. Thank you. I’m sure it will be great.”

“You just have to have your OSU IDs because we bought the college student tickets.”

“We have them in our wallets.” He picked up the second card and opened it. It was a funny card and inside it had a Michael’s gift card.

Carole said, “We know you always need some kind of art supplies, but it’s better if you pick what you need.”

“Thanks. For this and for everything. Breakfast was delicious.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Happy birthday. I hope it’s a good one. I gotta run. I have committee meetings this afternoon. That’s why we had a birthday breakfast instead of dinner.” He waved on his way out the door.

Trish and Finn got up to clear the table.

“You two can go back up and work on your schoolwork or whatever before you go to class later. The rest of us are heading out.”

“Thanks again,” Sam said.

She patted him on the shoulder on the way out of the room. “You’re welcome, honey. Have a good day.”

Within a few minutes everyone had left.

Kurt said, “So, Mr. It’s-my-birthday, let’s go upstairs so I can give you my present.”

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Sam sat down on the bed and closed his eyes as he had been instructed to. Kurt laid his gift in front of him on the bed.

“Open your eyes.”

“Oh, wow! It’s perfect. How did you do this without me knowing?”

“Those few times I drove myself to work and came back to pick you up.”

“Yeah?”

“Well, I didn’t go to work. I came home and worked on it for an hour or two each time while you were on campus.”

“You’re sneaky.”

Kurt leaned down and kissed Sam. “I know, but you love me anyway.”
“I do.” He picked it up again. “It’s really perfect. Thank you. I know what I want to do now.”

“What?”

“I want to go out and get what I’ll need to make the gun.”

“Let’s get dressed then.”

Sam slid the holster out of the way and grabbed Kurt and pulled him onto the bed and then pinned him down. “More birthday kisses first.”

“As you wish…”

Sam laughed and kissed him.
“I liked your Junior Prom outfit better, not that you don’t look totally gorgeous, but your Junior Prom outfit had personality and flair – literally.”

Kurt smiled. “Me too, but this is a lovely suit, which I do like. And this will be so much more acceptable at Dalton. As a guest at Dalton, I’m not going to potentially affect the students’ ability to invite male non-Dalton students to Senior Prom. I’m not sure if any student has ever invited a guy to Senior Prom. So, as the possibly first people to do this, I don’t want to cause Nick or Jeff any problems like getting asked to leave because I’m wearing a kilt and not pants, as would be prescribed for men to wear to a formal event in Ohio.”

Sam worked on getting his tie on neatly. “I get it. I just like the kilt better. Then again, I like it best when you wear the kilt without leggings underneath.”

“Mmm hmm. You’d probably prefer it if I wore it the traditional way.”

Sam waggled his eyebrows. “Only in our room or our future home.”

“We are going to dance together tonight, right? “ Kurt straightened Sam’s tie that he was struggling with. Kurt kissed him. “Ready?”

“Yes. We have our fun in Columbus bag packed for tomorrow. We packed non-refrigerated snacks, including the fabulous and my personal favorite no flour banana bread for lunch tomorrow. We packed other things for fun too for later tonight. And the drinks are still in the Navigator. I didn’t bother bringing them in when we came back from Sam’s Club earlier.”

Kurt looked at himself in the mirror one last time. He picked his camera up. “Let’s go have pictures taken.”

They got downstairs and Finn and Trish were in the living room dressed up. Seeing them was hard for Kurt. Obviously their idea of having a costume prom had worked. Kurt even helped Trish get her outfit ready, but seeing them dressed up together made it real – Kurt wasn’t going to his own Senior Prom.

“You two look great,” Kurt said. “Definitely the embodiment of Marlene Dietrich and Gary Cooper. The white beret we ordered looks great with the outfit. I hadn’t seen them together yet. I wasn’t expecting you two to be dressed already.”

“Thanks,” she said. “You two look good. Get over here and take some pictures with us. We got dressed just so we could take pictures. We’ll take our outfits back off for a few hours before we get dressed to leave.”

Kurt and Sam went and stood with them and Carole took quite a few photos. She had them stand in pairs and then just Kurt and Finn together.

“Okay. I think I’ve taken quite enough. All four of you look great. We’ll be gone by the time you get back tomorrow night. Have fun. Be safe.”

“We will,” they all said.
Sam gave Trish his key for the Navigator. “We’ll see you all tomorrow. The zoo opens at 9:00. If you all don’t arrive by 9:15, we’re going in without you because we’ll assume that you all changed your minds.”

“Got it. We aren’t drinking so, we should be good to go that early or at least I will be and everyone else can just sleep while I drive, I guess.” She hugged Kurt and then Sam. “Have fun.”

“You too,” Kurt said.

They grabbed their bags and headed out to Sam’s truck. Kurt opened the back of the Navigator to grab the drinks, put them under the passenger seat in the truck, and then climbed in and moved to the center. Sam put the bags in the seat next to him and went around and got in to drive. He pulled out of the driveway and headed to Westerville.

Dalton’s Senior Prom was a joint formal event with Crawford County Day that took place in more than one location in the school. As they entered the school, they were met by Jeff and Nick, who signed them in, and then accompanied them to meet up with Sebastian and Dylan. They went into one of the halls where a photo area had been set up.

Sebastian asked the photographer, “Can we only have our photo taken with our date?”

“No. I’ll do group shots as well. All of the photos will be up on the site for you to choose from. So, don’t have me take photos that you don’t want other people to see.”

“Thank you. We’d like a photo of all six of us together first, please.”

Sebastian, Jeff, and Sam stood in the back with a small amount of space between them. Dylan, Nick, and Kurt stood in front of them, just offset to the right enough that everyone’s faces could be seen clearly. The photographer took a couple of shots.

“Okay, now we’d like to do pairs,” Sebastian said.

Each couple stood together and the photographer took a couple of shots each.

“Thank you,” they all said.

“You’re welcome. Enjoy yourselves. Be sure to visit us online Monday to view and download your photos.” Kurt picked up three of the cards with the details to view the photos. He handed one to Sebastian and one to Nick. They put them in their wallets and moved on to the next area.

They lined up to enter the dining area, which had been elegantly transformed with tablecloths on the tables and tableskirts for the serving areas. Once they were inside, they picked up plates and went to the various tables that were set with main course items, salads and fruits, cooked vegetables, and a wide selection of desserts.

They all made their selections and sat down at a table together. Underclassmen in their regular Dalton uniforms came around and took drink orders and delivered them. They cleared the plates when people finished as well.

“This is very fancy,” Kurt said. “The food is delicious, as usual. The cooks here are quite good. I will say I miss the food and the teaching. Going to OSU has been nice, but I did enjoy the classes here.”
Sam said, “The food here is really good. I enjoyed eating here when I stayed with Kurt on weekends.”

Kurt asked Nick and Jeff, “Are you two ready for your AP Exams?”

“Ugh,” Jeff said. “My brain is on overload, but I hope I’m ready. The tests start on Monday.”

Nick said, “We’ve been reviewing all week. If we don’t know it by now, I think it’s too late. Going to the zoo tomorrow is a break from the overload. We decided that if we don’t get high enough scores, we don’t. We’ve done our best and if that’s not enough, then we’ll just have to take those classes again in college.”

Jeff said, “Speaking of colleges, you said you’d tell us what you decided tonight.”

“You two go first. Or Dylan and Sebastian can.”

Sebastian said, “Dylan was sneaky and applied to three places in Paris back before I was willing to admit how I felt.”

Kurt smiled and winked at Dylan. “One of you two could write a rom-com about how you got together.”

Sebastian about choked. He covered his mouth with his napkin quickly. Once he regained his ability to breathe without coughing, he said, “Well, that would be amongst a very small group of X-rated rom-coms, if there actually are any.”

Kurt burst out laughing. “You might have to get really creative with the camera angles.”

“Or just fade to black… a lot,” Dylan said.

“I think we should leave the rom-com writing to Nick and Jeff’s story,” Sebastian suggested.

“Ours would get banned for underage content,” Jeff said.

“Never mind,” Kurt said and rolled his eyes and shook his head. “Back to our original topic – universities. Sebastian was telling us that Dylan very romantically applied to universities in France. Have either of you heard back from the schools in Paris? Are you still considering schools in England too, Dylan?”

“No. I’m going to go to one of the schools in Paris. I’ll email you a link to the school’s website later tonight. Telling you the name won’t mean anything, but you can look at the program and the information about the school.”

“I’ll do the same,” Sebastian said. “Telling you the name of the school I chose won’t mean anything to you either.”

Nick said, “We’ll go ahead and say. We choose Kent State. I got a scholarship offer and their architecture program seems really good. Jeff is going too. He’s still not completely decided what he wants to study. He’s going to take all of his gen ed courses that he doesn’t get AP credit for and then take a class in a couple of different fields he’s considering before he makes up his mind which major to choose.”

Kurt said, “That makes sense. And we chose Kent State as well. We both got early admission and Sam got offered two scholarships that will cover all of his tuition and I got offered a small scholarship as well. We can send you the name of the dorm we chose. Maybe you two can still
request to be in the same building, if you want.”

“That would be fun,” Nick said. “We picked one that had a layout we liked. It has it’s own bathroom, a larger room and then a room that’s a lot smaller – all in an area that’s square overall.”

Sam said, “That sounds like the same layout we chose. We don’t want to share a bathroom with other people, so we eliminated all of the dorm options that had shared showers on each floor and the ones that were set up like suites where four or six people share a bathroom. I’m not rich, but the few hundred dollars difference in price is well worth not having to shower with potential homophobes.”

“That’s why we chose the one that we did,” Nick said. “We thought about how Kurt described public school and decided we didn’t want to deal with that mentality.”

“I liked the divided space,” Kurt said. “We’re planning to disassemble the twin beds and store them underneath a queen bed. And if we’re not allowed to bring in a queen bed, I found these king bed toppers that are designed to turn two twin beds into a king bed.”

“We use one of those here since we’re not allowed to bring in beds. When we have our room inspections, we take it off and scoot the beds apart. Afterwards, we put it back on. So, we know they work. We’ll be taking ours with us.”

“Send me the brand of the one you have since it obviously works. You can’t feel a lump in the center can you?”

“Not if you get it on right. We didn’t get ours on tight enough a few times and then it’s less comfortable in the center.”

Their “waiter” came around again. “Just so you know, the desserts will be left out, in case you want to eat dessert later.” He cleared their plates.

Sebastian said, “Thank you, Thomas.”

“You’re welcome, Sebastian.”

When he was out of earshot, Kurt said, “Aww. A baby Warbler.”

Sebastian laughed. “He’s actually a baby lacrosse player. You’ve been to see me play and you know I’m the lacrosse team captain. He’s determined to make it onto the varsity squad next season. He’s a hard worker.”

They all stood up and headed downstairs to one of the large rooms where the orchestra rehearsals took place. They opened the door and stepped inside. The overhead lights were off. Strings of lights were hanging from the ceiling all around the room. The stage had a small group of instrumentalists playing music.

“This is really nice,” Kurt said.

“This is the formal dance area,” Nick said. “There’s another dance space set up where there’s a band playing upbeat music. We can go there for a while too. The other thing that’s set up is one of the other rooms that has a small stage has been set up with a karaoke machine. We can do that too, if you want.”

“Very cool. But I’d like to start in here. We can meet up later if you four want to do something else.”
“Nope. We’re going slow dance,” Jeff said. “We’re going to be all ooey-gooey romantic and dance.”

“Us too,” Sebastian said. “How this ended up being my life, I’ll never know, but I’m really glad it did. I will never be able to explain my own level of shock to have found myself in this situation.”

Dylan laughed at him. “He’s not alone in that personal shock. We’re the poster people for how to fall in love when you don’t intend to.”

The three couples moved to the dance floor and began to dance.

After a half-hour of slow dancing, Sebastian and Dylan danced their way towards Nick and Jeff. Sebastian said, “We’re going to go see what’s going on in the other rooms.”

Nick nodded, but he and Jeff continued to dance.

They let Kurt and Sam know too, but they decided to check out the other rooms as well.

They went toward the karaoke room first.

“Kurt?”

He turned to see who had called his name. “Headmaster Lawson. It’s nice to see you. He turned back to Sam. “Go head. I’ll be right there.” He turned back towards the headmaster.

“It’s nice to see you as well. I’m certain that that young man you’re with is not a Dalton student.”

“He’s not. That’s my boyfriend, Sam. We came as Nick and Jeff’s dates. We can leave if it’s going to get Nick and Jeff into trouble.”

“I have no knowledge of rules that prevent a senior from inviting anyone they choose to as their date to Senior Prom, but I am aware that Nick and Jeff are a couple, so it somewhat unusual for a committed couple to invite another committed couple to be their dates.”

“Unusual seems to be one of my life’s defining adjectives. Sam and I can’t attend our own Senior Prom without personal security, so Nick and Jeff invited us to come with them so we wouldn’t miss out on going to prom altogether.”

“You’re not safe at McKinley?”

Kurt explained what had happened since Valentine’s Day. “And in a great ironic twist to the story, the guy who was outed and now lives in fear for his life is the very guy who threatened to kill me last year.”

“So the assailant becomes the target.”

“Yes.”

“He’s not still at McKinley is he?”

“Not now. He vanished after the jocks posted photos of him kissing the guy who looks similar to me all over the whole school.”

“Do you wish you had stayed here?”
“I can honestly say ‘no’. I’ve enjoyed being at home with my family and if I had stayed, I would have never become close with my stepbrother. His mom and my dad married the week before I came here last year. He was homophobic, honestly, but he’s changed a lot and matured and we’re good friends now. If we hadn’t lived together this past school year, that wouldn’t have happened. It took a lot of effort on his part to relearn falsehoods about homosexuality and I think it took him living with me and Sam to see that we’re just like everyone else. There’s no difference in how I feel about Sam and how my stepbrother feels about his girlfriend. So, even though the whole school aspect of it turned sour again, I’m still glad I stayed in Lima. He’s going to be my stepbrother as long as our parents stay married and family is a lot more important than a single school year. We’ll be headed in different directions for college, but we’ll be parting as good friends rather than acquaintances with a lot of interpersonal tension.”

“Well, that’s definitely a positive. Where have you chosen to go to college?”

“Kent State. My goal is still to move to New York City. It’s just going to take a little longer, but I’ll get there without massive debt hanging over my head.”

“How’s your father doing in Washington?”

“He’s busy. There was a steep learning curve, but he’s gotten the hang of things now. Taking the subway, wearing suits, and sitting in meetings was never part of his life before. It’s all very different. But he’s hoping to be able to make a difference.”

“We can all hope. I won’t keep you.”

Kurt nodded and followed the people walking through the hallway to the karaoke room and found Sam.

“Sing with me?” Sam asked when Kurt walked up.

“Sure. What are we singing?”

“I was thinking ‘Lucky’ since we know it.”

Kurt nodded. “Let’s go.”

When they came down off the stage, Kurt stopped in his tracks. “Wes!”

Sam walked farther out into the crowd, giving Kurt time to talk to Wes.

“Kurt, sounding as lovely as ever.”

“Thank you. I didn’t expect to see you here.”

“I didn’t expect to see you here either. Margaret is a senior this year.”

“I didn’t realize that she was a year behind you.”

“Well, she’s headed to West Haven, so no more long-distance relationship.”

“That’s good right? Except that you don’t really sound that enthusiastic.”

“It’s been a long year apart. I’ve grown a lot and changed and she’s still in her high school sisterhood period, for lack of a better description. She’s broken up with me twice and called me back within a week both times apologizing. We’ll see how it goes. Her parents and mine are very invested in us staying together. So, I never know whether the calls to apologize are her actually
regretting her decision or whether she’s been told to do it.”

“You don’t love her.”

“I don’t dislike her. There’s a lot to be said for mutual tolerance and being able to get along with someone.”

“I suppose so. It’s better than the opposite.”

“So, how are you here?”

“I’m Jeff’s date.”

Wes looked confused. “Come this way.”

Kurt followed him to some chairs along the edge of the room. They both sat down.

“I saw Jeff and Nick’s hysterical rendition of ‘I’m Coming Out’ that they performed right after school started last fall. They broke up? And you’re dating Jeff now?”

“Nope. They’re still together, still in love. No problems whatsoever. Nick invited my boyfriend as his date. A lot of things have happened. The bottom line was we couldn’t attend our own Senior Prom so they invited us as their dates so that we’d get to go to prom, even if it wasn’t the one at our own school. The two of them and two new students have become our best friends over the last school year. Well, I already knew Sebastian and we were best friends as children. Anyway, as I said, it’s a long story.”

“Sebastian, the new lead Warbler?”

“That’s the one.”

“I see. Well, I don’t, but I’ll take you at your word. I hope you and…”

“Sam.”

“I hope you and Sam enjoy yourselves. It was nice seeing you.”

“You too. Actually, can I ask you a question?”

“Sure.”

“It’s a pretty nosy one.”

“Alright. I might not answer, but you can ask.”

“Why did Blaine get all the leads when there were other Warblers who were as good or better than him vocally?”

“The truth is that I’m not straight. I’m bi. The day Blaine transferred to Dalton, I was assigned to show him around the school. I fell for him that day. God, he was cute. My parents are very conservative. In their eyes, the only way to be is straight. I was already dating Margaret. We had been dating for several months already, since she had turned 16. I had turned 17 already. Blaine was too young for me to date, even if my parents would have allowed me to date a guy since he was just 15 at the time. But I had it bad for him. We became friends. I encouraged him to audition and I was already on the council. Anyway, it was wrong and childish and fueled by unrequited love.”
“Does he know?”

“No. At least not that I know of. You’re the first person I’ve ever actually told. And I know you are capable of keeping it to yourself.”

“Just so you know, he’s at McKinley now. His parents got divorced. His mom moved them to Lima. He’s graduating early.”

“I know. He and I are friends on Facebook.”

“He’ll more than likely be in New York in the fall, which is only a couple of hours on a train from New Haven.”

“My parents would disown me.”

“It’s your life, not theirs. Is that why you were initially so nice to me, and then pretty much ignored my suggestions later?”

“Yes. I told you it was petty. But you fell for him just like I did. I could see it in your eyes. And I could see him being supportive of your ideas like I had been supportive of his. He was taking on the mentoring role that I had done with him. But I still had this crush on him and I wanted him for myself, even though I couldn’t bring myself to tell him. It was stupid. And I finally came to my senses, but the New Directions killed it with those original songs.”

“Which are no longer allowed.”

“I see. It makes sense though, in a way. It’s supposed to a performance competition, but when judges see that the performers wrote the songs, it would likely sway their opinions.”

Kurt stood. “Consider Margaret in all of this as well. It’s not just you that your actions affect.”

Wes stood up as well. “You always push everyone’s buttons. You know that about yourself, right?”

“I hadn’t ever really thought about it, but I won’t deny that it’s a possibility. It was good to see you. Blaine’s going to the zoo with us tomorrow morning when it opens, if you’re interested in seeing him while you’re here. You’re welcome to join us. It was nice seeing you.” Kurt got up and went to look for Sam.

When he found him, Sam pulled him into a tight hug. “I looked around for you, but I didn’t see you. I stayed in here thinking maybe you had gone to the bathroom. And then I got worried, and then I remembered where we are, but then I went back to being worried.”

“I’m sorry, sweetie. I was still talking to Wes. We just sat down along the wall over there.” Kurt pointed.

“It’s okay. I guess I didn’t realize that there were chairs over there. I can’t see them with everyone standing up in here.”

“Do you want to sing again or go check out the other room?”

“Let’s go see the other dance room.” Sam took his hand and they headed out the door and followed the signs.

They walked in and the band was playing “You Don’t Know You’re Beautiful”. They stopped
inside the door and Kurt moved them until he could see who was singing, even though he was sure he was right. He got close enough to see that it was Trent. He sounded really good. The band was Trent and four other Warblers. Sam started to sing along. He wrapped his arms around Kurt from behind and sang into his ear.

*If only you saw what I can see,*

*You’d understand why I want you so desperately,*

*Right now I look at you and can’t believe*

*You don’t know – oh – oh,*

*You don’t know you’re beautiful.*

Kurt opened Sam’s arms and freed himself, but took Sam by the hand and moved even closer to the stage. When they were at the front, Kurt waited until he got Trent’s attention and then pretended to swoon like a groupie. He nearly caused Trent to lose his place in the song from laughing. Kurt stopped what he was doing and started dancing along instead. After a few songs, Kurt pushed them back out toward the edge.

“If’s go get a drink and maybe some cheesecake if there’s any left.” He led Sam back to the dining hall. They looked around and Kurt found two slices of cheesecake. They sat down and one of the servers brought them some water.

“So, what do you want to do after we eat this?” Sam asked.

“Maybe some more slow dancing. I’m not even sure what time it is.” He pulled out his phone. “It’s not quite 9:00.”

“We don’t have to stay until it ends or we can. Whatever you want,” Sam said.

“What about what you want?”

“I already have that. I’m spending the evening with you. Here or elsewhere. I really want to kiss you, but I don’t want to cause a scene.”

“Oh, now that I have an answer to – after we finish.”

Sam smiled at him. “Okay.” He put the rest of his piece of cheesecake in his mouth.

Kurt laughed. “Eager much?”

Sam nodded and tried not to laugh and choke.

Kurt finished eating his slice, teasing Sam by putting each bite in his mouth with precision and licking the fork seductively. Once he finished, he got up and Sam followed him. Kurt led him to the circular staircase and they walked up to the upper level, around to the area that overlooked the staircase. He stepped back into the corner against the door that was closed to the teacher’s offices that he knew would be locked.

He slipped his hands inside Sam’s suit jacket and put them on his waist and kissed him. “I love you.” He kissed him again. “Do you want to go back and dance more?”

Sam didn’t answer. He pressed in and licked at Kurt’s lower lip.
Kurt kept the kisses chaste. He whispered, “I can’t. I won’t be able to keep control of other things if we start making out.”

“Let’s go dance some more then.” He pecked him on the lips. “I love you too.”

They went back down the stairs to the area where the traditional music was being played. They went back in and a waltz was playing.

Sam said, “I remember what you taught me. Let’s waltz.”

They stepped out together and joined in. They were the only male-male couple on the dance floor, but their fluid movements together made them fit right in. When the next song started, they continued to dance. After a few more songs, Kurt led them to the edge of the room.

“We can go whenever you’re ready.”

“Let’s see if we can meet up with the other four and take a few candid shots or some selfies before we go.”

About 15 minutes later, they were all sitting on the staircase and one of the girls from Crawford County Day was taking pictures of them. They stood and posed themselves several different ways for more pictures. They thanked her and let the next group of people use the stairway as their backdrop.

“Do you two need to sign us out?” Kurt asked.

“We probably do,” Nick answered. “We’ll follow you to the front doors just to be sure.”

When they left, Jeff said, “We’ll be at the hotel in a little while. We’ll call you when we get there.”

Sam and Kurt waved as they went down the stairs to the parking lot.

Kurt and Sam checked in and went up to their room. Sam put the bag down he was carrying and got the suit hangers out. He and Kurt hung their suits up. Kurt pulled the garment bag out and put it over their suits. They slipped their dress shoes into the shoe slots on the interior of the bag. They were left standing in their dress shirts socks and underwear. Sam stepped towards Kurt and started to unbutton his shirt. Kurt reached out and did the same.

“Kurt, please?” Sam pressed in and kissed him deep and desperate, arms wrapped around him like he never wanted to let him go.

“Yes, of course.” Kurt kissed him with just as much passion. “What do you want?”

“You.”

Kurt answered the door after he looked out to see who had knocked. Sebastian stepped inside.

“Well, you’ve been thoroughly fucked.” He looked at Sam standing a few feet back from the door.

“And so have you.” He laughed. “Do you two even have enough energy to go swimming with those of us who’ve not yet had the pleasure you’ve already had tonight? More than once I might add.” He smirked and chuckled.

“Bas!”
“What? I’m not stupid and it’s a legitimate question. I don’t want to have to give you CPR when you drown because you’ve orgasmed yourselves into exhaustion and fall asleep in the pool.”

“We had a nap. We’re fine.” Kurt said sharply.

Sebastian cackled. “You’re not even going to attempt to deny it or change the subject? My, my, my. I think I’m a bad influence. The problem is that I’m not sure that I’m sorry about it.”

Kurt play smacked him. “Are we going swimming or not?”

“Yes.”

“Then go change and meet us in the pool room.” Kurt half-heartedly pushed him out the door and closed it behind him.

“He knows how to rile you up.”

“He always has. But I still love him. Let’s go swimming.” Kurt saw the flash of hurt and confusion in Sam’s eyes. “But first…” Kurt pushed Sam against the wall, but not roughly. He kissed him soundly. “I’m in love with you Sam Evans. You and only you. There is absolutely nothing between me and Sebastian except years of him teasing me and me falling for his nonsense and us being best friends anyway. I fell for the ‘Maman said we can have cookies.’ And I got them out and brought them to his room. And then when asked why we had cookies when it was almost lunchtime, he looked like he had no idea why I would have gotten the cookies out. Or the time he told me that ‘merd’ was a polite word to say when you’re aggravated like ‘shucks’. Only to be lectured by my own mother on how rude it was to say ‘shit’ when I was five. He told me that his cat liked to take baths. I had never had a pet. I asked him if I could do it. We ran the water, and then he shut me and the cat in the bathroom. At least I wised up and didn’t believe him about his cat liking to run in the dryer with the door open like a hamster on a wheel.”

“He didn’t.”

“He did.”

“He was a little terror.”

“But he was also fun and I had the best times with him. He and his mom left and then my mom died and my world went pretty dark. It stayed that way for a long time. You changed that. He came back. And he’s leaving again soon and that’s hard. So, yes I love him, but like that annoying brother that drives you insane, but always has your back. He marched to his own drummer and so did I, but we had each other’s backs. Maybe not to his mom about the cookies, but to the other kids. When they were mean and said I dressed funny because I liked fancy clothes, he’d tell them off and stick up for me. He told them to mind their own business and that my clothes were cool and they were just too dumb to know any better. Just like they were too dumb to speak more than one language. And then he’d say comforting things to me in French and tell me to ignore them and we’d go off and play together.”

Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt. “You never told me about those other things.”

“They were so long ago. We were just little kids. I just have bits and flashes of memories, but the feelings are there. And he’s leaving again and I like how things have been this school year with having people to do things with that actually WANT me to be there. I’ll stop.” Kurt took a deep breath. “I don’t want to ruin the last month of time with him and Dylan. Let’s go swim and have fun. These memories won’t just be flashes of things. Let’s go make them great memories like the
first time they went to Aunt Eunice’s and when we went for Easter.”

“Those were fun. And we’ve done lots of other fun things. Comic Con, the museums, we’ve gone out dancing, and movie nights and sleepovers.” Sam grabbed a couple of the towels from the bathroom and they left for the pool.

Kurt, Sam, Dylan, Sebastian, Jeff, and Nick ate breakfast in the hotel together. After they finished, they went back up to their room to finish getting ready to go. Kurt packed their lunch, food for them to snack on, and their water bottles in Sam’s messenger bag.

When he came out of the bathroom, Kurt slipped it on over his head cross-body and handed him the garment bag. Kurt grabbed their other stuff and opened the door. It finally clicked what shirt Sam was wearing.

“To the zoo?”

“Yep. Sebastian says it’s his favorite article of clothing that I own.”

Kurt laughed. “I’m sure.” He looked around and didn’t see anything else. He opened the door and let Sam walk through. “I like the patches on your bag. They give it a lot of personality.”

“Good. Bags with personalities are a lot more fun to talk to.”

Kurt hip checked him. “You’re a goof.”

“But I’m your goof.”

“That’s true.” He switched the hand he was carried their overnight bag in and reached out for Sam’s hand and interlaced their fingers.

They went downstairs and checked out. They went back and got a cup of coffee to go from the breakfast area after they packed their stuff in the truck, and then they headed to the zoo. They didn’t have to wait long before Nick, Jeff, Sebastian, and Dylan arrived.

At 9:15, Kurt got a text.

--We’re here. I’m driving into the parking lot right now.

He responded.

--OK

They waited. Wes walked up. He got Kurt to follow him a little ways away from the other five.

“Margaret called it off after prom last night. She said she wanted us to have one last nice evening together, but that she didn’t love me and she knew that I didn’t love her. She said that despite the fact that she got into Yale, that she had turned it down and had accepted a scholarship to Princeton. He parents don’t know yet.”

“What will your parents do?”

“Scramble to find a new suitable partner for me, I suppose. Or tell me to find a few options so they can vet all of them and eliminate any unsavory choices.”
“What are you going to do?”

“Visit the zoo.”

They walked back to stand with the others. A few minutes later, Kurt saw the group from Lima walking toward the entrance – Trish, Finn, Artie, Quinn, Santana, Brittany, Mike and Tina. And then just a little behind them, he saw Puck, Sugar, Rory, Blaine, Rachel, Mercedes, and Shane.

As soon as Blaine got close enough to see that it was Wes standing with the other six, he picked up his pace and hugged him when he got close enough. “Wes! How did you end up here?”

“Kurt invited me last night. I decided to take him up on the invitation. I’m home from New Haven for the summer and it’s good day to visit the zoo.”

“Well, it’s great to see you.”

“You too. I like this look. Very stylish, yet casual and relaxed. I haven’t seen you out of a uniform or Dalton-issued clothes very often, but this is a good look on you.”

“Thanks.”

Everyone got in a group and Kurt counted all of them – 22. He collected $5 from each of them for their group tickets and went to the counter and paid. He came back with their tickets and maps and distributed them. They all headed for the gate and went inside.

“Make sure you have the cell number of whoever you rode with so no one gets left behind,” Kurt said as the started towards the first exhibits.

A few of them stopped and exchanged numbers. While they were standing around, Santana approached Kurt, who was leaning back against Sam’s chest with Sam’s arms around him.

“I want to know how you managed to get us into the zoo for $5 each.”

“Principal Beiste helped me. She called, set it up as a field trip, and managed to get them to agree to let us come on a Sunday. That’s why she was surprised when we were talking about still doing a Senior Skip Day since she had helped me plan this. And of course, that’s why everyone else was surprised that Sam and I weren’t going to Senior Prom at McKinley because I had been talking about this as our post-prom event.”

“There’s more to it than that.”

“Maybe, but that’s the bottom line.”

She rolled her eyes. “Fine. Keep your secret, but you did good. It’s usually like $20 or something.”

“I know.” He winked at her. “I’m excited. I’ve never been here before. Are they done horsing around? There are animals to see.”

“I’ll get them.” She walked over to the group. “Listen up! You can talk while we walk. There are animals to see. Let’s move it.”

Kurt and Sam had made peanut butter sandwiches on the banana bread that Sam loved. The two of them went to grab picnic tables for them all to sit at and they ate their sandwiches while they waited for everyone else to get their food.
Once everyone was back, Kurt said, “We’re going to do our college or future plans reveal now, like we had planned. Who wants to go first?”

Finn stood up. “I’m going to the University of Toledo, and so is Trish. We’re going to be education majors.”

Mercedes said, “I’m going to LA to follow up on an offer I got to sing back up on an indie label. Shane is going to UCLA on a football scholarship.”

Santana stood up next. “I’m going to Ohio State to study marketing and Brittany is taking classes to be a dance and fitness instructor.”

Blaine stood up, “I’m going to NYU to study music.”

Sebastian stood up. “I know you don’t all know me that well, but Dylan and I are going to Paris for college.”

Quinn stood up, “I already told everyone that I’m going to Yale to study drama.”

Mike said, “I’m going to the Ailey School in New York City to study dance.”

Puck stood up and said, “I’m going to be an electrician. I’ll start school in June.”

Kurt noticed that Rachel didn’t look like she was interested in sharing, so he stood up.

“Nick, Jeff, Sam, and I are all going to Kent State. Nick is studying architecture. Jeff hasn’t decided his major yet. I’m studying musical theatre, and Sam will be studying art.”

Kurt sat back down and put his hand under the picnic table and slipped his fingers under the edge of Sam’s shorts and lightly caressed his leg. Sam scooted closer and wrapped his arm around Kurt’s waist. They ate the apples they brought and listened to everyone else talk.

Kurt noticed Rachel standing off to herself in the aquarium, watching the fish swim around in the large tank.

“Hey.”

“Hello, Kurt. Thanks for arranging this. I haven’t been here since I was really little. It’s a really nice zoo.”

“You’re welcome.” He stepped closer and spoke as quietly as he could and her still hear him. “I noticed that you didn’t share your college plans.”

“I don’t have anything to share.”

“You didn’t get into NYADA?”

“I got wait-listed.”

“Oh. What does that mean specifically?”

“It means that I have about two more weeks of waiting to see if I get another letter offering me a spot that someone has turned down. But I can’t imagine anyone turning down a spot at NYADA, so I’m pretty sure that I won’t be getting a letter. Technically, I could get one any time between
tomorrow and two weeks from now. The deadline for people to accept the spots at NYADA was May 1st, so they started sending out letters offering spots to the wait-listed applicants on Friday. If no one turns down their spot now and someone drops out after the first semester, I could be offered their spot. If not, I can reaudition next spring. Blaine got a rejection letter from NYADA, but he got into NYU obviously.”

“I see. You could go ahead and move to New York as soon as school gets out and you could work for a year and then apply to NYADA or one of the SUNY schools. From the research I did, some of the SUNY branches have good programs. Living in New York City for a year would allow you to visit every music program in the city and find one that fits your interests.”

“Maybe. I didn’t know that you had applied to schools in Ohio.”

“NYADA was a long shot. The tuition is out of my budget range. To attend, I would need a massive scholarship. I didn’t bother to apply to NYU due to the cost. One year at NYU or NYADA would be more than the cost of all four years at Kent State. They have a good art program and a good musical theatre program. Sam and I will move to New York after we graduate. I’m still going to give getting a role on Broadway my best shot. I wouldn’t have auditioned for roles until after I had graduated anyway. At least this way, I won’t be graduating with 10 years of school loans to pay back. Things are different for you because you have two dads who’ve had professional jobs your whole life and they can afford the tuition at a place like NYADA or NYU. My dad can’t. There are other Ohio schools with good music programs, if you decide not to go to New York for now.”

“I’ll think about it. It was stupid of me to put all of my eggs in one basket, but it felt like applying to more than one place meant that I didn’t have enough faith in myself to get into the place I most wanted.”

“I guess it really just comes down to whether NYADA is it for you. If you don’t think you can be happy anywhere else, then keep reapplying until you get in. Madame Tibideaux applied to Juilliard four times.”

“I wasn’t aware of that.”

“You have to do what’s right for you. But before you put that much stock in a particular school, you should really go and spend time there and talk to the students. Be sure it’s worth making it the hill you’re willing to die on.”

“That’s good advice. I should have gone and personally visited the school.”

Kurt could see Sam moving toward them. “You can still go.”

“That’s true, I suppose.”

Kurt nodded.

She went back to watching the fish.

Kurt walked back to where Sam was standing. He reached out for Kurt when he walked up. Kurt took his hand. They moved down a bit and looked at the jellyfish.

“She got wait-listed.”

“Ouch.”
“Blaine didn’t get in, but as you heard he got into NYU. So, she’s waiting to see if she gets offered a spot once NYADA sends out offers to any waited-listed applicants over the next two weeks.”

“Did you tell her that you turned your acceptance down?”

Kurt shook his head. “I didn’t tell her that I got in at all. I didn’t say anything about applying to other places in New York either.”

“Okay.” Sam wrapped his arm around Kurt’s waist.

Everyone gathered at the fountain right before the zoo was going to close. Once everyone arrived, Kurt said, “I need to collect the $36 for Kings Island from each of you, like I said in the email. I hope you brought it in envelope like I asked, but if you didn’t you’ll have to wait until last so I can come up with someplace to put your money.

Santana said, “I still want to know how you’re pulling of these deals.”

“For this, I’m just buying them all online and adding the special $5 drink wrist bands at the time of purchase. So, we can seat 16 people in the Navigator and Sugar’s mom’s SUV. Jeff, Nick, Sebastian, and Dylan are driving together from Dalton. If everyone here today is going Friday, we’re going to need one more person to drive because we have more than 16 people from Lima here today.”

Shane spoke up, “I can’t go Friday. My mom will not let me skip school. I tried to convince her.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, Shane.” Kurt turned to Wes. “Wes, you’re welcome to join us if you want, but I’ll need $36 from you today. And you’ll have to ride with the guys from Dalton or drive yourself since you don’t live in Lima.”

“I’d like to go. I’ve never been to Kings Island. It sounds like fun.”

“Okay. Everyone follow me out to Sam’s truck and be ready to turn in your ticket money. Remember the $5 wristband is for unlimited drinks all day, but you’ll still need to bring money for food, which is pricey. Or you can pack food in a cooler and meet up to eat it, and then go back inside after you finish. No food can be brought in.” They all followed him to the truck.

Kurt and Sam made it back to the house before Trish and Finn. They carried everything into the foyer and reset the alarm. They took everything upstairs. The only thing they emptied was the bag they had put their swim trunks in, and then they got in the shower.

When they got out, Kurt pulled the covers back and plopped into bed. “Snacks for dinner later. I want what’s left of my Sunday snuggles.”

Sam turned the lights off and started the book they had been listening to. He plopped into bed next to Kurt. “I agree to your terms. Come closer.”

When the disc ended, they both got up and sat at their table and ate some more banana bread and some turkey jerky they still had in Sam’s bag. Sam changed the CD and they got back in bed.

After the second CD ended, Sam changed it to music and turned on the twinkle lights because it was dark outside. He climbed back in bed and lay down on his side. Kurt turned over to face him.
“No more book?”

“I like the book. But I want to talk.”

“About anything in particular?”

“Nope. Just one of our random conversations that I love.”

“Hmm.” Kurt scooted towards Sam and kissed him. “I hope we do decently in Chicago. I don’t think there will be a Glee Club next year, which is really sad to me. Without a Glee Club, we might never have met.”

“Sugar, Tina, and Artie will be the only ones left. I guess there are the Cheerios girls, but it will be hard to get new guys. I guess Artie could play bass and they could have an all-girls group.”

“There’s no staff sponsor right now.”

“There could be someone new. It’s just up in the air. But I get wanting to go out with a bang. I’m hoping that whoever wrote that stuff on the lockers is graduating so that no one will be subjected to that next year.”

“You know what?”

“What?”

“We’ve been together for 14 months.”

He kissed Kurt. “Mmm – 14 months of Kurt kisses.”

“At first I felt like my whole world had been turned upside down, but really you turned it right side up. You made everything better. Much better. Awesomely better. I’m sorry the same hasn’t been true for you. I’m glad your hand is almost all the way better, but I’m still mad about what they did to you.”

“You don’t still feel like it was your fault do you?”

“In my head, I know it wasn’t, but my heart says otherwise sometimes when I feel down and I let things start to get to me. It’s because of me that you didn’t get a normal high school experience here. If you had stayed in the closet, they wouldn’t have hurt you. And you’d be at school like a normal senior.”

“Yeah, at a high school in Kentucky. And you’d probably be dating Blaine.”

Kurt stopped to think about what Sam said. If he hadn’t been dating Sam already, he might not have been so quick to block Blaine from kissing him after he offered to sing “Candles” with him. *I probably would have let myself get caught up in the draw of finally having someone interested in me. Without Sam’s influence in telling me that he liked me, the real me – I would have let myself be changed into a Dalton boy.*

“Oh, you win. I’ll shush those thoughts about how it would have been better for you to stay in the closet. Although, I guess there was the option of us secretly dating for all this time.”

“I’m glad we didn’t. I’m not saying that I’m glad that those jackasses attacked me. But if nothing else, it really showed Finn the reality of things. He was so reticent to stand up to Karofsky, like it was your job to stand up for yourself against every homophobe. When he saw us really comfortable
with each other and us being together and being totally normal like other couples, he started asking questions and getting his head on straight. He had to rethink and reconsider all of his beliefs about being gay. You know the attitude he had before – that you brought the bullying on yourself by dressing weird and not being masculine. But when he saw them turn on me, who doesn’t dress any different than he does and who is every bit as ‘masculine’ as he is, that was an eye opener I think. He had to reconsider how he had bought into the idea that you had brought the bullying on yourself. And when he screwed up andouted Santana and found out that her grandma wouldn’t speak to her anymore, I think the reality of the things he had read about because Carole made him last spring finally got through his head. If I had stayed in the closet, he would have seen it as me being ashamed and I don’t think he would have changed the way he has. I’m not saying that I’m glad any of the bad stuff happened. It’s just that sometimes events have outcomes that weren’t a direct result of what happened, but the event was a catalyst for another event.”

“I still wish you hadn’t been hurt.”

“And I wish Karofsky hadn’t bullied you.”

“I know. Bad things happen. We deal. Hopefully, we’ll face less homophobia in college.” Kurt ran his hand down Sam’s upper arm, and then slipped it underneath and put it on Sam’s waist. “Are you still considering going to DC and doing the legal paperwork part of getting married and then having a ceremony here sometime soon?”

“I want to, but then I ask myself why I want to do it now.”

“And what answer do you have for yourself?”

“It’s always the same. I love you and want to be married to you, but I don’t to rush you or make you feel pressured.”

“I’m not even sure who all I’d invite to a ceremony. I know the New Directions would probably get offended if we didn’t invite all of them. I would honestly be happy for us to go and get married and not tell anyone. We can still have a ceremony when we graduate from college. We can have a wedding and a reception then, if you want.”

“You would do that?” Sam asked.

“A marriage is an agreement between two people. I know that in olden times it was an agreement between families. Land and goods were traded and consolidated. Alliances were strengthened and whatnot. But that’s not how things are now. Us getting married is purely between the two of us. It’s a personal decision we’re making. It doesn’t affect anyone but the two of us. And since it’s not even recognized here, it has even less of an effect since it won’t change our financial aid for college or anything.”

“We can still think about it. We don’t finish our OSU classes until the second week in June.”

“I can call the housing department at Kent State too and ask some questions. How about we turn off the twinkle lights and go to sleep? I’m actually really tired and we have Glee before school.”

“Sure.”

Kurt got up and unplugged the twinkle lights and started some music again. He pulled the covers up and snuggled up against Sam. “I love you. I’m so glad to be with you.”

“Me too. I love you too.”
“I give you … Cooper Anderson.”

Cooper kissed Coach Sylvester, and then hugged her. “Thank you, Sue.” He released her and she walked to the edge of the room, looking somewhat dazed.

“Guys, it was just a few years ago that I was sitting in a sad, drab room like this with dreams like yours that I thought would never come true. But you know what? They did. So, tomorrow at Sue’s insistence, I will be teaching a Master Class in acting for anyone who’s interested in becoming successful in the business like me.”

Most everyone in the room clapped.

Miss Pillsbury said, “Mr. Anderson, this is so generous of you to share your time and expertise.”

Rachel brought up the possibility of Blaine and Cooper singing together. Blaine was hesitant, but eventually got up and sang “Rio” with Cooper, who did his best to show Blaine up in every possible way. By the end, it had become nothing more than a competition between the two of them to get the most attention from the audience. Kurt overheard Cooper praise his own performance while saying nothing to Blaine.

After Blaine and Cooper finished, Cooper sat down and listened to them as they ran through the vocals for their group number.

“Oh, my God, he’s ridiculous,” Kurt said, after he got in Sam’s truck. “Broadway is dead? Don’t pay attention to your scene partner? He may be good looking, a good singer, and a good dancer, but his brain is running on fumes.”

Sam laughed. “What kind of fumes?”

“I have no idea. But seeing him explains so much about Blaine. He’s 10 years older than Blaine. The taller, older, handsome, talented, STRAIGHT brother. I bet he’s said ridiculous things to Blaine his whole life. And that nonsense yesterday about sitting in a sad, drab classroom? What a load of hooey. He went to a private school in Columbus – I’d bet money on it. Blaine went to a private school before he transferred to Dalton. I bet Blaine’s dad wants him to be a lawyer or something after his brother is in commercials. Or maybe he supports him since he’s straight.”

“I will agree that going today was a giant waste of time.”

Friday morning at 9:50, 19 people waited while Kurt went to get in line to pick up the tickets and wristbands. Once he had them, he passed them out.

“Don’t lose the wristbands or you’ll have to pay for new ones and I think they’re $9.99 purchased at the gate. Be here at the front at 8:00 this evening. That’s when the park closes.”

Wes and Blaine took off together to the central area of the park.

Since Sugar, Quinn, and Rory didn’t care for rollercoasters, they headed off with Artie to ride the regular rides.
Brittany and Santana headed into the kiddie area of the park to ride the Snoopy ride that Brittany wanted to ride first.

Kurt, Sam, Finn, Trish, Sebastian, Dylan, Nick, and Jeff all headed to the rollercoasters.

Mike, Tina, Mercedes and Puck had already gotten a good head start on them and were about 20 people ahead of them in the line.

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By the end of the day everyone was tired. They all grabbed a drink on their way to the front. Before they hit the highway, they stopped at the McDonald’s that was near the park. They got out and went inside to order. They ate quickly and went back out to their vehicles to go home. Kurt noticed that Blaine didn’t get in Sugar’s mom’s SUV. He got in Wes’ car and left with him.

They stopped at the Wal-Mart in Lima where everyone had left their cars that morning and dropped everyone off. Kurt waited to make sure everyone’s cars started, and then drove the four of them home.

Finn asked, “Why’d you invite that Wes guy that none of us knows?”

“Oh, he and Blaine were close friends for the past few years. He graduated last year. I thought Blaine might appreciate having someone on the trips he was good friends with. Why?”

“I just wondered. You never talk about him, so I didn’t who he was. To be honest, I didn’t pay attention to anyone else in the Warblers when we competed last year. I watched you because I knew you, obviously, but I didn’t really look at anyone else’s faces.”

“That makes sense. Anyway, Blaine hasn’t really made any close friends at McKinley. He boxes with Puck, but other than that I don’t know who he hangs around with except Rachel and she opted not to go today. She called me Monday morning before I went to the bank, so I just gave her money back Wednesday morning. I have no idea why she changed her mind, so don’t ask.”

Trish said, “I had a lot of fun. Thanks for including me.”

“I’m glad your dad let you skip school and come with us,” Kurt said.

“I was surprised,” she said. “But he said I’ve been a good student and deserve the day off to have fun with friends. So, he called the school and told them I had an appointment and wouldn’t make it in.”

“An appointment at a theme park?” Sam laughed.

“Well, he didn’t want to lie and say I was sick.”

“I know. It was just funny.”

“Well, I had a good time. I’ll see you two sometime soon.”

Kurt and Sam headed inside.

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Kurt walked into the choir room and was met by Rachel. “Kurt, you’re here! I got a letter in the mail yesterday offering me a spot at NYADA. I already sent in my acceptance and dorm deposit.”
“You decided on a dorm?”

“I did more research after we talked. A dorm seemed extraordinarily expensive especially with how high the tuition is, but Daddy sat down with me and we started looking at 2-bedroom apartments. They are outrageously priced. I would really need more than just Blaine as a roommate to get my cost down to the price of the dorms. I decided I should move into the dorms, make some friends, and then find an apartment off campus next year. That way I can find three people who want to share a 2-bedroom place. Or if the dorm is nice, I can just stay. They offer vegan options in the cafeteria. So, it would save a lot of time commuting and shopping and cooking.”

“Well, congratulations. I hope it turns out to be everything that you hope it is.”

“Me too. I’m just so excited.” She stepped closer to him. “No one will ever know I was wait-listed. It’s not like first-year students would have access to who got in during the first round of admissions. I only told you and Blaine. Everyone else I told I was still waiting to hear back from NYADA.”

“I understand.” He stepped back. “So, now everyone knows?”

“Yes. I blurted it out when I got here. I was so excited.”

“Congratulations, again.” Kurt moved on to helping pack their costumes.

Once they had finished, Miss Pillsbury got Santana to get everyone’s attention. Once they were quiet, she began to speak. “Chicago is about a 5-hour drive from here. Chicago is on central time, which will push our arrival time back by an hour on the way there. We will be leaving at 5:00 sharp Friday morning. Please arrive at 4:45, so we can quickly load these items into the back of the bus. You may bring a pillow if you wish to sleep on the ride there. Please pack light.”

Coach Beiste spoke next. “Miss Pillsbury and I will be the chaperones. Coach Sue will also be going with us. She has a license that will allow her to drive the bus. I have authorized some of the funds from you winning last year to be used as educational field trips while we are in Chicago. Friday morning, we will be driving straight to the Shedd Aquarium and spending most of the day there. We’ll leave at 4:00 to go to the hotel, where you will all stay put. No wandering around like last year. If you’re found outside the hotel and it’s not on fire, you’ll be banned from performing on Saturday. Am I understood?”

Everyone nodded.

“Good. Friday evening, we will be allotted 20 minutes on stage to rehearse. Saturday, you will all go to the theater and stay inside the building. Again, anyone found outside the building won’t compete. Once the competition is over, win or lose, we’re going to a famous Chicago pizza place. It’s a cultural culinary experience. Once we’re back to the hotel, everyone stays inside. If you’re caught out of the hotel, it will go on the underclassmen’s permanent record and any senior found skirting the rules will be banned from walking through the graduation ceremony. I am absolutely, 100% serious about you all staying where you belong. Sunday, we’ll be embarking on another learning experience by spending most of the day at the Museum of Science and Industry.”

Miss Pillsbury spoke again. “We’ll stay there until 3:00. We’ll return to the school around 9:30, due to stopping somewhere for dinner for 30 minutes on the way back. That should give time to empty the bus and return home for a good night’s sleep for school the next day, which is review day for all of your finals. Wear comfortable shoes. Girls, please do not show up in heels that you can’t walk around in for six hours. The school dress code is in effect for the trip. No vulgar t-shirts, no underwear showing, etc. You know the rules. Does anyone have any questions?”
Santana said, “Are we paying for our own meals this time?”

Coach Beiste answered, “Not exactly. Everyone will be allotted $10 for lunch and dinner. Breakfast is provided at the hotel. Anything you want to eat outside that budget, you’ll need to pay for yourself. So, if you want an $8 dessert, you’ll need to spring for that yourselves. And if you don’t show up at the assigned time for lunch, you’ll be on your own. We’ll discuss those specifics on the bus.”

Miss Pillsbury said, “Any more questions?”

“Room assignments?” Mercedes asked.

Coach Beiste said, “Due to ongoing security issues for Kurt and Sam, they will be placed in a room on their own so that they can make sure the door stays locked at all times. We’ve booked three adjoining rooms with six beds for the girls. And another two adjoined rooms for the guys, so four beds total for the guys. After curfew, girls only in the girls’ rooms and guys only in the guys’ rooms.”

The warning bell rang. Kurt and Sam stood up and walked to the door. Coach Beiste got up to escort them out.

“Thanks for the private room,” Kurt said.

“You’re welcome. I can’t really envision anyone bothering to travel that far, but since it is a school event, I have to provide you whatever security I can. I’ll be escorting you to the room each evening and I’ll be meeting you two each morning to walk you down to breakfast. I’m trusting you two to stay inside the room in between.”

Sam said, “We will. That’s not a problem.” He winked at Kurt.

Kurt closed and locked the door, plus he flipped the extra lock. He started undressing as he stepped closer to Sam who was already undressing as well.

Sam said, “If I ever get rich, I want a really, really big aquarium. It can take up one whole wall.”

“Maybe we should just paint one wall in a room a flat white and project a video of one of those huge aquariums onto the wall. It can be on like a 12-hour repeat, so there’s no obvious looping.”

“That’s a possibility. It’d be less expensive than feeding all of the fish and cleaning the tank, but we’d need to get state-of-the-art projection equipment so it looks real. It would be so relaxing. We could project it onto our bedroom wall, like where the bookcases are now.”

“Sounds like a plan. My plan for now is to get you the rest of the way undressed though. Is that okay?”

“Mmm hmm,” he mumbled as he kissed Kurt. “I loved the otters. And the dolphins. And the jellyfish of course. I always like watching those. I wonder if they’re hard to care for. We could get a tank and put a few of those in it. They’d be fun to watch.”

“They would be. We need to make a long-term wish list. Things we want to get or see or do in the future.”

“You brought your sewing kit right?”
“I did.”

“Can you sew my new patch on my bag?”

“Yes.” He pecked Sam on the lips. “Of course. I can do it again with the machine when we get home.”

On their way to the theater, Coach Beiste got their attention. “At 4:30, the top 10 list will go up. The Showcase starts at 5:00 this year. We will all meet in the lobby of the theater at 4:30 to see if you’re in the Showcase.”

When they entered the theater, Kurt saw Burt first.

“Dad?”

“Hey! Yeah, we brought your fan club with us.”

Kurt looked past him and everyone else came walking toward them. Mercedes ran up and hugged Shane. Trish walked over to Finn and wrapped her arm around his waist. And Sebastian walked straight up to Kurt and kissed him on both cheeks, French style.

“You!” Kurt said indignantly.

Sebastian cackled. “You love me and you know it.”

Kurt smarted back, “The unanswered question is always ‘Why?’” He hugged Sebastian.

“Now, wait,” Jeff said. “As President of the Kurt Hummel Fan Club, shouldn’t I have gotten the first hug?”

“Get over here, Jeff.” Kurt hugged him too. “You guys are nuts.”

Nick said, “We learned from the best.”

Carole shook her head and laughed at all of them.

“We need to go get dressed and warm up, but I’m really glad you all came. I’m assuming you brought my baby.”

Burt answered, “We did, but Carole and I are flying out to DC tonight. Trish is driving it back unless Principal Beiste will let you take it back yourself.”

Kurt and Sam were the only ones still standing in the lobby.

Kurt said, “We’ve gotta go. I’ll talk to her about everything.”

The top ten groups names had just been posted. Kurt and Santana went to look. They came back a couple of minutes later.

Santana said, “We’re on the list. We need to get changed back. We need to warm up for the Showcase. Move it.”
Thirty minutes later, they were standing in the wings waiting for the group on the stage to exit. They took their places and performed to their very best. They audience was up on their feet and clapping along almost immediately. When they finished, the girls stayed in place and the rest of the group joined them in the triangle formation they had worked on. They bowed quickly in synch and waited for the curtain to come down and quickly headed off the other side of the stage.

Once all 10 groups had performed, they sat around in the auditorium waiting for the judges’ decisions. The placements were called from 10th to 4th. Each group stood and was recognized. The last three groups assembled on the stage.

“In third place, last year’s champions, the New Directions from Lima, Ohio. Congratulations!”

The second and first place winners were announced. Each group was photographed with their trophy and then they exited the stage.

The fan club members waited at their seats for Kurt, Sam, and Finn to come down off the stage.

Burt said, “Carole and I are leaving for the airport. You all did great!” He patted Kurt on the shoulder.

Carole hugged him. “You were really good. I’m glad we came. I’ll be back Wednesday.”

Kurt nodded.

Burt and Carole left the auditorium.

Kurt said, “Okay, Coach Beiste said that Trish can stay with the girls if she wants. Or she can release Finn to get his own room, but he has to pay for it. The same is true for Shane. He can either stay with the guys, or he can get his own room. It can’t be with Mercedes because she’s not allowed to let McKinley students of opposite gender room together. What Trish does is her own business because she’s 18 and doesn’t go to McKinley.”

“All right,” Trish said. “I’ll think about it while you all change.”

“The four Dalton students will have to get their own room because there are not enough sleeping spaces in the two rooms she has rented for the guys.”

“We already rented rooms,” Sebastian said. “Ages ago.”

Kurt continued. “If the six of you want to join our field trip to the Museum of Science and Industry, you need to each pay $10 in cash to me or you can wait until tomorrow and pay $18 at the door, but you can use a card for that.”

They each got $10 out and handed it to Kurt.

“Excellent. We are all going out to some famous Chicago pizza place. You’ll have to pay for your own dinners.”

“Not a problem,” Sebastian said. “We’ll meet you in the lobby? We can ride the bus with you to the restaurant right?”

“I didn’t think to ask that question. Meet us in the lobby and we’ll find out.”
The New Directions spent their time before school singing goodbye songs to each other. Kurt got up and sang “I’ll Remember”. After he finished, he said, “This Club gave me a place to belong when I had no where else. I will always remember that.”

Sam got up next. “At first I balked about joining this club because of the way the jocks talked about everyone. Eventually, I got up the nerve to join and I’m really glad I did.” He sang “Friends in Low Places”, which made everyone laugh.

Quinn got up next. “I joined this club for reasons I won’t even bother to mention. And I know that I’ve made a mess of things plenty of times, but I think I’m finally getting things right and I want to thank all of you who’ve been there for me. This song means a lot to me.” She sang “I Hope You Dance.”

Not everyone had a song to share. Rachel got up last. “This song comes from one of my favorite musicals. I know, you all think that they’re all my favorites, but I really do like this one a lot. I know we’re all going our separate ways, but I hope everyone finds what they’re looking for.” She sang, “Climb Every Mountain.”

Dalton’s graduation ceremony was on Friday evening. Burt, Carole, Finn, Trish, Kurt, and Sam went to see Sebastian, Dylan, Jeff, and Nick graduate. Afterwards, they had a combined family dinner at a local Mexican place in Westerville where they managed to get a private room.

After they finished, the four Dalton students transferred their boxes to their parents’ cars. Nick drove Jeff and Sebastian drove Dylan to Nick’s to spend the night so they could go to more graduation ceremonies the next day.

When Kurt pulled into the driveway, he saw the Evans family had already arrived. Stevie and Stacey were chasing each other around the front yard. Carole opened the door and Mary and Dwight took their bags inside.

After Finn introduced Trish to Sam’s family, he took her home.

Saturday morning was North Lima’s graduation. Mary had brought her crockpot as did Trish. Mary and Carole had started soup in all three crockpots that morning.

The four Dalton students walked in first. Burt walked in next to Kurt and Rob walked next to Sam. Carole and Finn walked in behind them, keeping the two of them from being approached by anyone. They all clapped when Trish walked across the stage. Kurt and Sam held hands as they saw the four guys that had attacked Sam for the first time since the plea deal. Fortunately for them, North Lima’s ceremony was really short.

When it was over, they left and went back to the Hummel’s where the Evans family was hanging out. Aunt Eunice had arrived while they were gone. Once everyone came back from Trish’s ceremony, they all sat down together and ate bowls of soup and crackers and talked for a while before anyone left for McKinley.

Burt and Dwight left when Kurt, Sam, and Finn did. Principal Beiste had decided that the best defense for the day was a good offense in the form of the boys’ fathers being there. Burt and Dwight stood nearby the entire time the seniors practiced their formation for entering the auditorium and lining up on the risers. Kurt and Sam were strategically placed so that they were
both on the end of the risers with Sam standing in the row behind Kurt during the class photo that was taken before the ceremony.

Everyone else arrived at the school and was in the auditorium when the ceremony started. Burt and Dwight were positioned in the wings on the side where the students would file through to have their photo taken right after they received their diploma. Kurt and Sam wouldn’t be filing back around and re-entering on the opposite side and lining up on the risers. No one wanted them to be on the risers during the craziness that would ensue at the end of the ceremony when students started tossing their graduation caps in the air.

The ceremony started and the speeches were given, the students filed across the staged alphabetically, took their diplomas from Miss Pillsbury and were photographed shaking hands with Principal Beiste and receiving their diplomas before they exited to have their photos taken again individually. Everyone filled back onto the risers.

After another speech, the screen was lowered and double images filled the screen – each student as a toddler and their senior photo. The photo montage was set to a recording the New Directions had done of their “Fly/I Can Fly” medley.

When the screen was raised, Principal Beiste congratulated the Senior Class of 2012. The seniors on the stage started whooping and hollering and tossing their caps in the air, except Finn because Carole had asked him to keep track of his for photos afterwards.

Finn made his way to where Kurt, Burt, Sam, and Dwight were standing. The five of them left through the door into the school. The senior New Directions met up with everyone in the choir room afterwards to take some group photos in their robes before they left.

They didn’t have another big sit-down meal since they had gone out they night before and they had eaten lunch together. Mary and Carole baked quite a few Sam’s Club pizzas to feed everyone. Kurt was surprised by the day-early birthday party the teens had planned for him when they quickly decorated the room when he when up to bring a pizza down.

By the end of the evening, Finn and Trish had taken Aunt Eunice back to Zanesville stay with her for a couple of days, the four members of the Evans family were in Finn’s room getting ready for bed, Jeff and Nick had gone back to Findlay, and Dylan and Sebastian had gone back to Columbus.

Sunday the Hummels and the Evans spent the morning and early afternoon at the lake where Kurt had take Sam hiking the first time. The kids had a great time swimming in the lake and Kurt and Sam kept a close eye on them. The four adults sat under beach umbrellas watching them.

When everyone had gone to bed, and the house was quiet, Sam asked Kurt to sit down on the bed. He leaned back against the headboard. Sam got his guitar out.

“I know you said not to get you anything for your birthday. And I didn’t go against your wishes. Instead, I found a song I want to sing for you.”

Kurt smiled and pulled his knees up and got comfortable. Sam winked and him and started to play and sing.

You know I'd fall apart without you
I don't know how you do what you do
'Cause everything that don't make sense about me
Make sense when I'm with you

Like everything that's green, oh, I need you
But it's more than one and one makes two
Put aside the math and the logic of it
You gotta know you're wanted too

'Cause I wanna wrap you up
Wanna kiss your lips
I wanna make you feel wanted
And I wanna call you mine
Wanna hold your hand forever
And never let you forget it
Yeah, I wanna make you feel wanted

As good as you make me feel
I wanna make you feel better
Better than your fairy tales
Better than your best dreams
You're more than everything I need
You're all I ever wanted
All I ever wanted

And I just wanna wrap you up
Wanna kiss your lips
I wanna make you feel wanted
And I wanna call you mine
Wanna hold your hand forever
And never let you forget it
Yeah, I wanna make you feel wanted
Baby, I wanna make you feel wanted

You'll always be wanted

Kurt gave him a chance to put his guitar back in the case next to the bed, and then he wrapped his arms around Sam’s neck, kissed him, and then toppled them over onto the bed. “That was beautiful. I love you. And you do make me feel wanted every single day.”
Monday morning, Kurt woke up first and used his lips as an alarm clock, Gomez Addams style. Sam started squirming before Kurt even made it up to his elbow. He abandoned Sam’s arm and went for his lips instead. Sam grabbed Kurt and flipped them and start licking along his ribs, which made Kurt start laughing so hard he could hardly catch his breath, and then Sam remembered that it was early and it wasn’t Finn who-sleeps-like-the-dead down the hallway, so he quit licking Kurt and went back to kissing him.

“You are always so much fun,” Sam said. “What was with me being Morticia?”

“Just to be funny. And you are very kissable.”

“Is that so?”

“It is. Let’s get up and sneak out and go get pictures printed so your parents can take them home with them.”

“Good idea. Maybe we can find some good frames before they get picked over when we go to get what we need for today.”

“Another good idea. We’re just full of good ideas.” Kurt bucked up when Sam started licking his neck instead of his ribs. “That’s also a good idea.”

Sam continued his trail of licks and kisses.

After spending 30 minutes deciding which pictures to print, they finally sent the order back. Kurt’s phone pinged with a text from Carole asking him where they were. When he responded that they were at Sam’s Club, she sent him a list of things to buy.

They went to Goodwill first and picked up several frames for $.99 each. They found a Spiderman tank that would fit Stevie and a cute red and white polka-dot sundress that would fit Stacey. They looked through the books and picked out 10 paperback books they’d like. Sam found a pair of black cargo shorts he liked. They grabbed the pair of swim trunks and the swimsuit for Stevie and Stacey that had been their original goal.

“I have to get this for her.” Kurt held up a light brown bunny backpack to show Sam.

“You don’t HAVE to.”

“Oh, but I do. It’s adorable. It’s the softest, fluffiest bunny backpack ever.”

“You spoil her.”

“It’s $2.99. Maybe you could find something suitable for Stevie. There’s lots of bags. Maybe he’d like a messenger bag like you have.”

“I’ll look.” Sam dug through the pile of bags. “I found something better than a messenger bag.”

Let’s go.”

When they left Goodwill, they went back to Sam’s Club and picked up everything Carole had asked for and paid for it, plus they bought a variety box of donuts. After they paid, they went to the photo lab and paid for the photos they had printed.

When they got back, they managed to get the clothes for the kids and the backpacks in the washer without getting caught.

Carole and Mary were busy making some side dishes. Stevie and Stacey were out back playing in their pajamas, while Burt and Dwight sat on the back porch talking.

Kurt and Sam cleaned the photo frames and put the photos in. They left the ones for their families on the dining table. They put the ones they had printed for themselves on the shelves in their room. They moved the stuff in the washer to the dryer on the way up. When they came back down, they got Carole and Mary to follow them into the dining room.

“These are for you, Mom” Sam said. “There’s one of me and Kurt from prom, one of all of five of us from graduation, and one of me from graduation.”

Kurt said, “And there’s one of all four of us in our prom outfits, one of me and Sam from prom, one of all four of us from graduation, and a photo of me, and one of Finn from graduation. I don’t have access to download Finn and Trish’s photos from Prom.”

“I’ll have to get that from Finn. Thanks for these. I’m going to go put them in the living room.” She picked up the four that were hers.

“Thank you,” Mary said. “You look so fancy for Prom.”

“They had a professional photographer there. Once I get the professional ones from graduation, I can send it to you.”

“Thanks, honey.” She picked hers up and took them upstairs to put with their stuff.

Kurt and Sam went back to check on the stuff in the dryer. Everything was done. They grabbed the books they had bought and divided them into the backpacks, and took the shirt and dress with them outside. They held them behind their backs and stood on the porch. It didn’t take long to be noticed.

Stacey ran up. “What’s behind your back, Kurt?”

“I have something behind my back?” He feigned shock that she would think such a thing.

“Yes!!”

He pretended to look behind his back. “Nope, nothing.”

“Not like that,” she said. “Put your hands in front.”

“Close your eyes first.”

They both closed their eyes.

“Put your hands behind your back.”

Sam and Kurt slipped the backpacks up onto their shoulders and moved back around to the front of
“Now, put your hands out in front.”

They put the clothing in their hands.

“Open your eyes.”

“That’s a neat dress. Do I get to wear it today?”

“You can ask Mommy.”

“Hold it so I can see what’s on my back.” She handed the dress back to Kurt and turned and saw Chewbacca. “That’s cool.” She pulled hers off. “Aww! Look how cute it is. It’s so soft.” She unzipped it. “There are books inside.”

Stevie had already discovered his books, but he was quieter as usual. “The backpack is cool. Thank you. I like the shirt and the books too. Come on, Stacey. Let’s go see if we can wear them today.”

They went running inside together to find Mary. Sam and Kurt followed them. By the time they caught up, Stacey had the dress on and Stevie was wearing the tank instead of his pajama shirt and he was headed upstairs to put shorts on.

Mary said, “You two spoil them.”

Kurt said, “It was $15 for all of that stuff, so less than one dress at regular price. Maybe we do spoil them, but at a deep discount.”

Mary just rolled her eyes. “The backpacks are cute and they can carry books and small things around in them instead of having to use their big school backpacks. I’m sure they’ll use them a lot this summer. That was really sweet.”

Kurt smiled and leaned back into Sam, who wrapped his arms around Kurt.

Kurt asked, “Do you need help with anything?”

“No, but when they come down, you can show them the donuts that magically appeared in the stuff you brought home,” Carole said. “I’ll pour them a glass of milk.”

They were right back down with Stevie in pair of jeans that were way too short.

Mary saw him and laughed. “Honey, those weren’t what I meant for you to wear.”

“I didn’t see anything else in the suitcase that was mine.”

“I must have grabbed the wrong pair. I was going to turn those into shorts, but didn’t get it done yet. I must have laid them in the wrong stack.”

Kurt said, “I can turn them into shorts in about 15 minutes. Just let me mark them, Stevie.”

He stood still for Kurt, who grabbed a pen and marked where to cut them. He was young enough that he didn’t think twice about just taking them off and handing them to Kurt. He climbed up on the stool and grabbed a donut. Kurt took the pants upstairs. Just like he said, 15 minutes later, he was back downstairs with a pair of jean shorts. Stevie hopped down, put them on, and got back up on the stool.
“Thanks, Kurt. Can I have another donut, Mommy?”

“Cut it in half first since you ate breakfast an hour ago. That way if you get full, someone else can eat the other half.”

“Okay.” He showed Sam which one he wanted, and Sam cut it in half.

When he only ate half, Sam picked up the other half and ate it. Kurt poured two glasses of milk and put one in front of Sam and chose a donut for himself and ate it.

Burt and Sam started to load things in the Navigator. Mary went upstairs to pack all of their stuff back up. Dwight went up and helped her carry everything down. Kurt braided Stacey’s hair in a double French braid and Stevie sat and watched him. Once everything was loaded, Stevie and Stacey got in the third row seats. Carole and Mary got in the backseat. Kurt drove and Sam rode shotgun. Burt rode with Dwight and they headed to Findlay.

Carole had already started the introductions when Kurt came in. “Jeff’s parents, Natalie and Howard Sterling. And Nick’s parents, Lynn and Jerry Duval.”

Dwight reached out and shook hands with both of the men. “It’s nice to meet both of you. Thanks for having us today.”

“You’re welcome. We’re glad you were able to come,” Howard said.

Stacey came inside and pulled on Sam’s hand. He leaned over. “There’s a pool in their backyard.”

“I know. We’re going swimming in a little bit.”

She squealed, but then she pulled on his hand again. “I don’t have a swimming suit.”

“I brought you one. It’s in our bag.”

She squealed again. “I’m sorry. I will be quieter inside.” She ran back outside to tell Stevie.

Natalie said, “She’s adorable.”

Mary smiled. “She’s equally rascally. She’s too smart for her own good sometimes.”

The four moms moved into the kitchen to get the dishes organized and the four dads moved outside to deal with the grilling. The four teens and the kids changed into swimming suits and got in the pool.

Jeff said to Sam, “We got some floatie rings and water wings if they need them.”

“I don’t know how well they swim now. Let’s ask them.”

Jeff got their attention. “I have a ducky floatie ring and some dolphin water wings. Anyone interested?”

“Me, me, me!” Stacey proclaimed. “I want the ducky floatie ring, please?”

“One ducky floatie ring coming right up!” Jeff said. He blew it up and she stepped into and jumped into the pool and started splashing around.
Kurt and Sam got in the pool too. Stacey swam over to them and kept her voice down. “Are Nick and Jeff boyfriends?”

Kurt nodded. “They are. They’ve been boyfriends for three years.”

“Okay.” She swam off again toward Stevie to share what she had found out.

After they had eaten and put away the food that could spoil, they sat Stevie and Stacey down to watch *Happy Feet 2* so the rest of them could talk.

They went to the dining room and sat around the table.

Jerry said, “I don’t know if Nick has told any of you what I do, but I flip houses. I’m a contractor and a licensed electrician. Howard is a realtor. We work together a lot. So, we got this idea to look for places in Kent. And we’ve found one. It’s a small 2-bedroom place with a 2-car garage. What we’d like to do is to buy it, and turn it into a duplex.” He pulled out a sketch. “What we’d do is rip out the current interior of the house and redo the interior with this floor plan. We’d turn the 2-car garage into a living area using the same basic floor plan, just rotated 90 degrees counterclockwise.” He also showed them a few photos of the house.

Howard continued, “The house is not in livable condition because the guy bought it to turn it into a student rental, but when the first place he finished ended up trashed by some students, he decided that being a landlord isn’t for him. So, it’s up for sale dirt cheap right now. And I can probably get him to go even lower – direct sale to Jerry no realtor’s fees. Nick did a lot of calling and researching. Kurt and can Sam can apply for a waiver to live off campus, which I am sure they can get. Nick and Jeff won’t be able to live off campus officially until next fall, but that doesn’t prevent them from living in the house on the weekends and basically whenever they want. They just have to have a dorm room and a meal plan. This place is just three blocks off campus. So, they can just eat before they go to the house or they can leave from the house in time to stop in the cafeteria and eat on the way to class. Even if we can get them a waiver to live off-campus this fall, we’ll still pay for a minimal meal plan for them. It will be a good transition for them to cook some of the time and still have regular meals available to them in the cafeteria since they are not used to cooking that much.”

“So, you’re going to buy this house, and turn it into a duplex so that all four of them can live there?” Dwight asked.

“That’s what we’d like to do. It will be much less expensive in the long run. We can make a return our investment by selling it when all of them have graduated. The maximum mortgage payment would be about $400-500 a month. If I add in cable, the utilities, and internet, you’re still looking at most $800 a month. Divide that four ways, and you’re looking at $200 each. And it can be less than that, if they put in some sweat equity. You know – help Jerry paint, put down flooring, put in the cabinets, and things like that. The building itself is solid. Brick exterior. The guy already reroofed it, and he had put in energy efficient replacement windows. We can buy the same ones to finish the garage into a second unit.”

Jerry said, “I can get a crew in there and get the plumbing done in a week. It can be ready to move into within a month or two of us buying it. What do you think?” He passed the drawing down so Burt could see it and continue to pass it. “It’s not a big place, but it gives them room to have a bedroom and an office. They have entrances on opposite sides, so they have some privacy. We can decide what to do about the backyard. It’s got a single privacy fence since it’s a single-family house right now. I’ve already contacted the city about the codes and stuff and I can turn property
in that neighborhood into a duplex.”

Kurt said, “Dad, that’s a quarter of the cost of living in a dorm. I know we’d still have to buy food, but Sam and I don’t eat that much.”

“Let me ask one more question before I send these two off to talk about it. If for some reason, they don’t stay at Kent State what would happen?”

“Jerry and I will rent out their half of the duplex until Nick and Jeff move out.”

Burt said, “And the reverse?”

“Yes. If Nick and Jeff leave Kent State, we would rent out their side until Kurt and Sam move out. We wouldn’t leave them homeless.”

Burt said, “You two go talk about this somewhere.”

Kurt and Sam got up and went outside to talk.

“You’re a lot faster at calculations than I am,” Sam said.

“I think this is less about calculations and more about what we want. Do you want to live in a small 2-bedroom place and be part-time next door neighbors with Nick and Jeff until they can completely live off campus?”

Sam stepped closer to Kurt. “I will live with you anywhere. But that layout looked nice. A bedroom and an office would be nice. We could have visitors who could stay in the office, like Finn and Trish once in a while, or even your parents. I’m not in love with idea of living in a dorm, and I know you aren’t either. This is an amazing location and a super incredible price. Even with my less-than-fantastic math skills, I’m pretty sure that we could both graduate with no debt at all.” He stepped even closer and kissed Kurt.

Kurt kissed him back. “We could. I think it’s a good idea.”

“Let’s go tell them, then.”

“We could even live there during Nick and Jeff’s last year, while working full time. We could save up enough to move to New York if we need to.”

“We could.” Sam said. He took Kurt’s hand. “Let’s go back inside.”

They went back in and sat down at the table.

Kurt spoke first. “We like the idea and we could work on weekends. If you do the plumbing the first week, we could come the first weekend that the showers and water can be used. We can camp in the backyard while the interior is being worked on. We just need to have access to a working bathroom.”

Jerry responded. “The plumbing is first because it will be the easiest to do when nothing else is in the house. Well, technically it’s second, since the interior demolition is only partially done. I’ll have to have a crew in to finish that. So, probably the second weekend after possession, you could come to help. I know that Sam has limitations on what he can lift and do, but I think he can still be a helpful part of fixing the place up. A lot of jobs take two people where one is leaning on something or holding something in place, or he can be the all-important go-fer, who keeps everything moving by grabbing what people need. And once we get to the flooring, he can
Howard asked, “I just want to make sure this is something that all four of you want to do. It will save everyone money, but I don’t want that to be your only consideration.”

“We’re sure,” Nick said.

Kurt nodded, “Us too. The four of us are best friends, but with this set up it’s like the best possible situation. We’ll live right next to our best friends, but we’ll still have our privacy. We won’t have to go outside and around the side of the house if we want to visit each other. We can just text them and they can let us in through the patio door since the patio doors will be side by side.”

Howard said, “Do any of you have any other questions?”

“You answered the only one I had,” Burt said.

Dwight shook his head, indicating that he didn’t have any questions.

Mary said, “I do really appreciate you looking into something like this. It will save a lot of money. We know how much places rent for and we understand that landlords have a lot of money invested, and some people, like the guy who currently owns that house, end up losing a lot of money when people trash their property. But this is a great opportunity for the boys to not have to pay a fortune to live in the dorms or rent from someone who would charge twice as much. And even at that, I’m sure that a lot of 2-bedroom places go for $800 a month in a college town without including any of the utilities or extras.”

Kurt said, “They do. Sam and I looked into rentals. The best we could find was a 1-bedroom place for $600, nothing included, and it wasn’t on the bus line, so we’d have to drive to campus every day, but that was still cheaper than $2000 a month for the two us to share a dorm room. Of course, we know we’d have to pay for food in the apartment, but it was still going to be less expensive overall. But this place is three blocks from campus. We can walk easily and we can still be part of the on-campus activities easily.”

“It’s like the perfect combination,” Sam said. “We can be part of everything easily, but live on our own without having to actually commute.”

Jerry said, “Well, then it sounds like we’re settled. We’ll go ahead with the purchase and I’ll get things moving. I haven’t bought another house to start on for the summer yet. If I do, I’ll see about getting something else in Kent to make it more convenient for me.”

They continued to pass the plans and the photos around talking about different aspects of the design.

Carole said, “This is a really good layout. I like that the living room has a lot space and the U-shaped kitchen/dining/living area gives each area a more open feel while still giving each section a feeling of being its own room. I’m not a fan of people being able to walk into my house and see the dirty dishes in my sink.”

Mary laughed. “Me either. I also love that you’ve put room for a washer and dryer in the design. Going to a laundromat adds so much time, even when you can do all of the loads at once. At home, you can do a load while you cook dinner or you can run a load while you get ready in the morning. But going to the laundromat always takes time out of your schedule, even if you try to read while you’re there or something.”

Kurt said, “I hadn’t thought about that yet. We’ve always had a washer and dryer in the house and...
they have laundry rooms in the dorms, so at least we wouldn’t have had to drive anywhere to do it.”

“A lot of rentals don’t have them,” Carole said.

Mary said, “The movie is going to be over soon. Why don’t you boys take the kids back out and swim for a while? We have to head out in about an hour.”

Sam went out with the rest of his family to say his goodbyes before they left.

Mary pulled Sam into a hug. “We’re so proud of you. You’ve overcome so much and you’ve become a good man. You’re going to college and getting married. It’s what your dad and I hoped for. You’ve made good friends who have really good parents too. After everything got so messed up last year, this is an amazing turn around. We’re really glad for you. We love you, honey.”

He stepped back. “I love you guys too. I’m glad you could come and stay all weekend. I know the school is even farther away, but maybe we can work out a few visits.”

She nodded and stepped to the side.

Dwight stepped over, hugged Sam, and stepped back. “We’ll do what we can. You’re a grown man, on your own now. I know you’ve got a couple of weeks left at the college so this school year doesn’t seem quite over, but you’ll feel more like it is the end of next week. We’ll talk to you when you call.”

Sam knelt down and hugged Stevie and Stacey. “I love you two. Have fun at the day camp this summer with Mommy.”

“We will,” Stevie said.

Stacey said, “I’m going to miss you.”

“Me too. But like Daddy said, I’m all grown up now and I have to go learn to do something so I can get a good job.”

“I know. I just wish Ohio wasn’t so far away.”

“We’ll see what we can do. We can Skype now that Mommy and Daddy got the internet at home now.”

“I know.” She hugged him tight. “I had fun this weekend. I like your friends. They’re nice. Bye, Sammy.”

He kissed her on the top of the head and patted Stevie on the shoulder. They all got in the car and he waved as they drove off.

Kurt came out after he saw the car pull off. He wrapped his arm around Sam’s waist. Sam turned and let Kurt hold him.

“Do you want to get back in the pool for a while?”

“Sure.” He took Kurt’s hand and they walked back into the back yard and got back in the pool with Nick and Jeff.
A couple of hours later, the four of them were back on the road to Lima.

“That’s a really great idea that Howard and Jerry have about the house,” Burt said. “I didn’t want to get into financial details sitting there with everyone in the room. I didn’t want to make your parents feel bad, Sam. But I want you two to know that there won’t be any need for you two to pay towards the house. We’ll pay that. And I don’t want you to feel bad at all, Sam. We’d be paying $10,000 more for Kurt’s room and board for three years in a dorm than it will cost to keep you two in that house for four years. I know you two will be working this summer, but I also want you to have time to enjoy your last summer before college and your real adult life begins. Go to theme parks or state parks, go out on the lake, go to zoos or museums with your friends before you all go your separate ways. With what Carole and I make we can put back enough this year to cover four years of you and Sam living in that house. Then if something happens in the future, it will already be taken care of. You two will need to take care of your other expenses, things like food, car insurance, and your phones. Please don’t argue about this. You made a choice to stay here and be fiscally responsible. We were already planning to help you as much as we could. It just so happens that by choosing an in-state school, what we can contribute would have only covered not even a single year of rent in New York City, but will cover four years of rent on this house in Kent.”

“I don’t know what to say, Dad. I’ve saved up money to pay for things too.”

“I know Kurt, but I want you to have time to be a college student. You’ll find more people like you and you’ll want to join things. College will be different than high school. I want you to really get to enjoy your time there, as well as work hard on your classes. You’ve worked a lot of your teens and you didn’t get to do a lot of things because of where we live and how people treated you, but I want college to be that time in your life when you’re free to learn about your field, but also to learn about yourself. I want you to join stuff, like clubs and stuff. Stick around if you like them, or move on if you don’t, and then find something else. You might like rock climbing or kayaking or playing intramural sports. You’ll never know if you’re working 20 hours a week. I’m not going to tell you what you can and can’t do and I won’t forbid you from working, but please consider what I’m saying.”

Carole said, “Burt’s right. There are so many things to try out and participate in. Stay away from drugs and drinking because those never turn out to be a positive in your life, but try other stuff. Join the college democrats or independents or libertarians or whatever. Join Greenpeace or Save the Whales or Hedgehogs or whatever. I’m being silly, but serious too. As an adult, you’ll do a job, and then you’ll go home. Some jobs have homework of sorts, but most do not require you to go to your job all day and then spend all evening doing more work at home. When you’re an adult, you’ll want to be a part of things. Going to work all day and coming home to sit in your home for the whole evening and all weekend isn’t really as exciting as it seems like it might be. You need to have other interests, just like you told Finn.”

“I get it,” Kurt said. “I just don’t want to burden you two with the cost.”

“We know that, honey, but seriously, let us be your parents for a few more years. You have your whole life to pay for everything yourself. Let us still pay part now.”

Kurt took a deep breath. “I’ll think about what you’ve said.”

“Fair enough,” Burt said. “We can talk again later. You and Sam can talk about it while I’m gone. And before Sam gets any silly notions that he’s not family, he should look at that ring on his finger. We already considered him family, but the day he accepted your proposal, he sealed the
“Deal. It’s a done deal, Sam. Unless, you’re backing out on marrying Kurt, you’re family.”

“Not a chance,” Sam said. He was already holding Kurt’s hand. He ran his finger across the band on Kurt’s ring finger.

“Well, we’re set then. No arguing about whether you’re family or not. You’re our son-in-law, just a little light on the ‘law’ part still since Ohio hasn’t joined the 21st century yet.”

Kurt laughed. He squeezed Sam’s hand.

Carole asked, “Do you two have plans for this evening?”

Kurt answered, “Unfortunately, we have a date with our homework. We went to Westerville Friday night, and we’ve been busy all day every day since then.”

“Even with knowing that you’re not done, it feels like you should be done,” Burt said.

“We know. Trust us, we know,” Kurt said.

Sam said, “I’d love to go downstairs when we get home and curl up and watch movies all evening, but that will have to wait until the end of next week. But at least we don’t have to be at McKinley at 7:00 in the morning anymore, so that will give us more time in the morning to study.”

“Since it’s nice out, we might shower to get rid of the chlorine, and then sit out on the back porch and do some of our homework.”

Carole said, “Well, whenever you get hungry, help yourselves to all of the leftovers from this weekend. Hodgepodge buffet is the menu tonight.”

“Sounds good to me,” Sam said.

“We’ll just be making a pit stop,” Burt said. “I’m going to grab my stuff and then we’re headed to Toledo for me to fly out. Carole will be back in a couple of hours.”

“We remember,” Kurt said. “We have the whole plan worked out. We’ll leave the Navigator at the airport for you to bring back when we fly out weekend after next.”

Sam stepped into the shower and grabbed Kurt’s shampoo and started washing Kurt’s hair. “I know we said we were going to do schoolwork, but I don’t think I can. I just want to talk and relax and psych myself up to get up in the morning and be back in my school-is-in-session mindset.”

After he rinsed the shampoo out, Kurt said, “That’s fine. I don’t have some burning desire to do it right this minute either. After we get out, we can just slip downstairs and bring some food up. We can eat up here, and then snuggle. We missed our Sunday snuggles.”

“I hate it when we miss those. Those really make a big difference to me.”

Kurt reached for Sam’s shampoo and did his hair. “I know. With all of the end-of-high-school events, we’ve missed too many times lately. We’ll do that tonight. It means a lot to me too.” He rinsed Sam’s hair. He put the sprayer back up and turned back towards Sam. “Turn around.” He stepped closer and used some body wash to massage his shoulders and arms. “You’re nice and relaxed.”
“Mmm. Two rounds of lovemaking will do that to a guy.” He turned and faced Kurt and kissed him. “I’d add another round of sexy showering, but I can’t yet. But I can kiss you. I love kissing you.” He kissed Kurt.

“Me too. Let’s finish up and go snuggle in the bed. We can relax more that way than we can standing up in here.”

Kurt finished up writing down his calculations. “So, Dad was right. If I stay in a dorm for three years, that would be about $24,000 just for the ‘room’ part. If he pays $400 a month for four years, that’s $19,200.” So, if Dad pays both of our shares of the house costs, he’ll save about $5,000 and we can live there the extra year if we need or want to.” Kurt put another spoonful of soup in his mouth.

Sam looked at the paper. “So, the ‘board’ cost is about $4000 per person, so $8000 per year for both of us, and we only get food for about 8 months. I’m certain that we do not eat $1000 worth of food a month. So, we’d save money on that too.” He took another bite of the leftover pizza slice he was eating.

“We can use the money we earn in the summer to cover the cost of our phones, our gas, our car insurance, and our groceries for the year. And I still need to find out if Dad is covering any part of my tuition. I’ll need to cover whatever he doesn’t.” He continued to eat his soup.

“That’s true.”

“I think I’m going to schedule us four days a week. Dad had a point. We may not be super close friends with anyone from McKinley, but it would be fun to have some time to do things. You spent last summer unable to do anything much, even though we did still have some fun.”

Sam leaned over and kissed Kurt under his ear. “We could go camping again.”

“We’re going to go camping every time we go to work on the house.”

“That’s true. But we could also go camping at the lake again.”

Kurt got up and rinsed his bowl out and left it in the bathroom. He sat back down and took a bite of the piece of birthday cake he brought up. Sam had already started on his.

“Thank you for making me a cake and surprising me. You’re a sweetheart.”

“You’re welcome. We never opened any of the cards we got.”

“We can open them after we finish eating.”

They finished and got ready for bed, even though they weren’t going to sleep just yet. Kurt turned the flameless candles on and plugged the twinkle lights in. They grabbed their cards and got in bed.

“Aww! Stacey made me a birthday card and a graduation card. I didn’t know. Now, I feel bad that I didn’t see them when she was still here.”

“You can tell her when I skype with her. She put hers in the basket when it went around to collect them when you weren’t looking.”
Kurt opened the next card. “This one’s from Finn and Trish.” He pulled out two folded sheets of paper. “The card says, ‘You two raved about seeing the Monet and Picasso exhibits in Cincinnati so much that we got you two tickets to see the upcoming ‘Art of the American Twenties’ exhibit at the Cleveland Museum of Art and two tickets to the Akron Museum of Art.’” He unfolded the papers. “The exhibit in Cleveland is from July 1st through September 16th. That will be fun. I just need to keep the papers some place safe so they don’t get misplaced.”

“That will be fun. We’ll have to look the websites up later. The Akron Museum must not be free like the museums in Toledo, Columbus, Cincinnati, and Cleveland.”

“Akron is smaller. Maybe they don’t get as much tax or donor support or something.” He opened a couple more cards. “Oh, this one is from Aunt Eunice.” He read the handwritten note on the side. He opened the gift card holder section. “Oh, my. She gave me a $250 Visa gift card, and the note says it’s to get whatever I need when I move out.”

“Wow, that was nice.”

“Really nice.” Kurt opened the last few cards. One was from Burt and Carole. “They put $100 bill in the card and said it’s ‘play money’ and that I have to do something fun with it.” Kurt smiled and rolled his eyes.

Sam opened his cards next. He didn’t have nearly as many because his were just graduation cards. “Stacey made me a graduation card too. It’s cute.” He opened one and looked the name on the envelope again. He opened it. “It’s from Aunt Eunice as well. I looked twice because it is obviously a birthday card and I thought maybe one of yours ended up in my basket.” He pulled out the gift card. “No way. She gave me a $250 card as well. I’m not even related to her.”

“Technically, neither am I. We both met her the same day about a year ago.”

“I have one more.” He opened it and laughed. “I got the same note in my graduation card from Burt and Carole.”

“Let’s put the tickets and the gift cards and cash in the locking file box. We’ll decide ahead of time what to use the money on and we can get it out then.” Kurt got up, pulled it off the shelf, unlocked it, and they put the stuff in. “Do you want the envelopes from your cards?”

“Nah.” He stacked the cards up and put them on the dresser. He grabbed Kurt’s too.

Kurt picked up all of the envelopes and stacked them up. “We could make some really nice handmade paper out of them.”

“That would be a fun project.”

Kurt put them with the art supplies in the cabinet. “Snuggle time. Music?”

“Sure. Not too loud though. I still want to talk, and kiss, and then talk more.”

Kurt turned on some classical music featuring cellos and got in bed. He lay down facing Sam. He took a deep breath and let it out. “So, happy birthday to me and congratulations to both of us on graduating.” He kissed Sam, barely more than a peck, and then he ran his hand down Sam’s arm until he reached his hand and brought it up to his lips. He kissed across his knuckles. “Next Saturday in Toledo should be cool.”

“I’m exited. It said something about oven mitts and leaf blowers. Using unusual painting tools. Who knows? It should be fun no matter what we end up making. We can use the same color
scheme and we can hang them together somewhere in our new place.”

“That’s a fun idea. We could pick a color scheme for our new bedroom or the office and go with that for the paintings. And we’ll finish before 2:00, so we can go watch that famous glass blower, whose name I have forgotten.”

“Me too, but it will be cool. We’ll watch him and then go to the lake.”

“Good plan.”

“Short answers mean it must be time for a kissing intermission.” Kurt scooted forward and kissed Sam.

They never got around to the “more talking”.

Nine days later, they left the OSU Lima campus hand in hand, having finished their last final exam. “We’re done,” Kurt said.

“Finally,” Sam said. “This group of classes wasn’t any harder than the others. The hard part was them continuing after graduation. Time to go home and pick for our stuff for DC.”

“After we stop for celebratory frozen yogurt?”

“Sure.” Sam unlocked the truck.

Kurt slid into the center from the other side. After Sam pulled his door shut, Kurt leaned over to kiss him on the neck, but Sam turned and kissed him on the lips. “We’re free. I feel so much better.”

They drove to the ice cream place and got two frozen yogurts with fruit and nuts. They took them back out to the truck to eat them. Sam drove down the street a bit and parked under a tree.

“We could go to the comic book store and get a new card pack for each of us. We’re definitely playing while we’re in DC. It’s been too long,” Kurt said.

“I was thinking of getting two more of those collage frames like I made for our New York pictures and doing one of DC and then one of all of the other places we’ve gone.”

“That sounds fun. We’ll have a lot of walls to decorate, so your artwork will be going up too. We should also start looking through the kitchen areas when we go to the different second-hand shops and Goodwills. We’ll need to furnish a whole kitchen ourselves.”

“True.”

“And unless Dad is letting us take our bed with us, we need to buy a bed. And a table and four chairs. Everything else we can get slowly.”

“We need to figure out where we can build some bookshelves because we need places to put the stuff on the shelves in our room.”

“I’d say the office. The bedrooms aren’t as big as our room. I think we’ll mostly just have room for a bed and a dresser. We should look on Target’s and Ikea’s websites for prices and ideas.”
“Eeny meeny miny moe…” Kurt said, as he picked up one of the card packs.

Sam grabbed one randomly. They walked around the store hand in hand. Sam checked out the boxes of old comic issues to see if he could find any he was looking for. He found one and pulled it out. When they got around to the area with D&D books and supplies, Kurt picked up a boxed game and tucked it under his arm where Sam couldn’t see. Sam looked at him, but didn’t say anything. When they finished looking around, they went up to the front to check out. They each paid for their own purchases and went back out to the truck.

“What’d’ya buy, hmm?”

“It’s a present for us. I’ve wanted to get it for ages, but I knew that we’d both get into it way too easily and we’d have a hard time making ourselves do our schoolwork, but now it’s summer. We can play it when we get back from DC.”

“Okay.” Sam pulled out and drove them home.

When they got there, they went upstairs.

“Are we going to wait to open our new cards until we get there tonight?”

Sam thought for a minute. “Nope. I’m too curious. I’m opening mine.”

Kurt smiled and pulled his out and opened them too. “Hmm.”

“Hmm indeed,” Sam said, as he added them to the cards he was going to take.

“Close your eyes.”

Sam closed them and stuck his hands out.

“What makes you think I’m giving you something?”

“I get to see what the game is, right?”

Kurt put the box in his hand. Sam opened his eyes and looked at the front and then turned it over.

“It’s a Mouse Guard RPG game. That is so cool.”

“I thought so. We’ll get Nick and Jeff to come over and learn to play it with us and then we can play like once a week all summer and keep playing it after we move into the house.”

Sam put it on the shelf with their other games. “It looks super cool. They’ve already read the books, so we should be set.”

Kurt sat down at the table and pulled a notebook toward him and opened it. He read through his lists. “I think everything is set.” He put the notebook back and got up. He put his bag up on the bed and started to check it.

Sam looked through his bag. “I’ve got everything.”

“I do too, except that I’m not wearing these shoes.” Kurt changed his shoes. He looked at himself in the mirror and went back in the closet. He put the shirt he had on in the laundry basket and grabbed one that matched what he was wearing. He came out buttoning it. He tucked it in.
“Ready.”

Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt. “Me too, except I need a kiss or two or ten.”

Kurt leaned forward for the kisses. “I love you. Let’s get going. Maybe we can find a place to sneak off to and kiss while we wait to board the plane.”

“You have the best ideas.” He kissed Kurt again quickly.

At little less than six hours later, they were knocking on the apartment door in DC.

“Come in,” Burt called out.

Kurt used his key to unlock the door. He let Sam go through, and then shut and locked the door behind them.

“The salads you asked for are in the fridge. I got the other stuff on the way back, too.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

“You’re welcome.”

They put their bags on the dryer in the laundry closet and closed the door back. They both washed their hands in the kitchen. Kurt pulled out some large bowls and Sam got the salads out. They assembled them and sat down at the table to eat.

Kurt said, “I already looked and there’s a Costco 14 miles from where we’ll be in Kent. I’m definitely getting a membership. I like a lot of what they sell. We can go every other week and stock up.”

“Sounds good to me,” Burt said. “I get everything there since it’s so close by. I can’t stay up tonight. I have to leave early in the morning. I’ll see you two tomorrow afternoon.”

“'Night, Burt.”

“'Night, Dad.”

They finished eating and sat on the couch and watched an episode of Psych. Once they had given Burt time to fall asleep soundly, they quietly went in the bathroom and showered. When they came back out, they unfolded the sleeper sofa and put the bed linens on. They piled the pillows together. Kurt sat between Sam’s legs and reclined back. They watched another episode before they decided to go to sleep as well.

The next morning, Burt was on his way out when he closed the apartment door just a little too hard and it woke Kurt up. He snuggled back into Sam.

“Too many clothes,” Sam mumbled.

Kurt sat up and undressed. “Better?”

“Burt?”
“Gone already.”
Sam wiggled enough to get his off. “Naked snuggles,” he said as he plopped back down.
Kurt chuckled and scooted back up behind him.
“Much better.”
Kurt began petting Sam’s leg and then moved to his chest and arm. He kissed along the back of Sam’s neck.
“Yes, but not yet. This is perfect.”
A few minutes later, Sam stirred and Kurt scooted back. “My turn.” He straddled Kurt and caressed him with just enough pressure not to tickle, the way Kurt liked it.
“You’re really good at this,” Kurt barely more than mumbled.
“I’m glad you’re enjoying it. I am too.”

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It hadn’t taken long for them to end up doing more than running their hangs all over each other. They showered again and threw the sheets in the washer while they made breakfast and packed their lunches. They ate and got ready for the day. They threw the sheets in the dryer on the way out the door.

They walked to the subway holding hands. “Ready for a day of art now?”
“Mmm.” Sam kissed him. “Michelangelo wished for a model as gorgeous as you.”
“Sam!”
“Yes, my love?” Sam looked at him and batted his eyes innocently.
Kurt rolled his eyes. “I love you too. And I happen to think he would have wished for a model that looked like you.”
“Well, we can each have our own opinion, but I would much rather have you lie around to sketch than to use a mirror.”
Kurt grinned. “What’s gotten into you this morning with all the sweet talking?”
“Oh, we’ve just been busy and I’ve slacked off, which I intend to correct.”
“I see.”

They went down into the subway station to wait for their train, which came quickly. They rode into the National Mall area and got off. They started at the Hirshorn, and after lunch they walked through the Sculpture Garden and the National Gallery.

When they finished, they walked through the outside area of the US Botanical Garden again. Sam looked around and there was no one near the two of them. He stepped back enough that he could
twirl Kurt, and then dip him. He took him by surprise.

Kurt stood back up. He smiled and laughed. “You are something today.”

“In love. That’s what I am. You’re beautiful, and I’m the lucky guy that gets to marry you.”

Kurt kissed him quickly and squeezed his hand. “I am a lucky guy too because I’m marrying my most awesome best friend.” Kurt looked around the area. “It’s so different here now that everything is in bloom. When we were here in March it was still too cold for most of the flowers.”

“Let’s take a selfie even though we’ve been here before. It does look totally different.”

They positioned themselves so that a lot of the flowers could be seen in the photo and took a few shots.

“Let’s go sit by the fountain and wait for Burt.”

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They rode the Metro with Burt out to the apartment. He grabbed his stuff to head back down to the subway.

“I’ll see you two tomorrow.”

“See ya, Dad.”

“Bye, Burt.”

He shut the door on his way out.

“Magic?” Kurt asked.

“Definitely, but let’s start dinner first. I’m hungry.”

Less than 15 minutes later, they were sitting at the table with their cards set up and each of them looking through their stacks trying to determine the best choice to make. They continued with their game until the oven timer went off. Kurt pulled out the chicken and broccoli casserole they had made and sat back down at the table.

Ten minutes later, they dished out their dinner and sat on the floor in front of the couch to watch another episode of *Psych* while they ate and cleaned up. Once the episode ended, they went back to their game. Sam won. They packed their cards up, made the sofa bed back up again, and showered.

Kurt double-checked the door, and made sure the curtains were closed completely before he put his pajama pants back in his bag. “No need for those tonight.”

Sam came out of the bathroom and got in bed. Kurt turned the light off and lay down. He had his phone in his hand still. He double-checked the alarm he had set in case they slept later than usual.

“All set.” He rolled back over after laying his phone on the end table.

Sam waited for Kurt to get comfortable and laid his head on Kurt’s shoulder and curled into him. “Good. The line is long in the mornings and I don’t want to miss our time.”

“Me neither. I’m excited.” He ran his fingers down Sam’s biceps.
Sam searched out Kurt’s other hand and interlaced their fingers. “Me too.” He tipped his head up and kissed Kurt on the neck.

Kurt kissed him on the top of the head. “I love you.”

“I love you too.” Sam snuggled in as close as he could.

“The line is as bad as you said,” Kurt said. “I’m glad you read about that so we didn’t end up missing our turn.”

Sam squeezed Kurt’s hand. When they finally got to the interior of the building, they emptied their pockets and put them in the tray, and then walked through the metal detectors. Once they picked their stuff back up from the tray, they headed to the right area of the building. They got there, got in line, and signed in. They sat and waited for their names to be called.

“This is a crazy busy place. You’d think they’d separate the uses for this space into a few smaller areas.”

“It doesn’t seem very efficient, but no one left me in charge. Maybe there’s something we don’t understand about the system.”

“Or maybe it’s just inefficient.”

“Kurt Hummel. Sam Evans.”

They stood up and went to the doors where their names had been called from. They looked at each other and Kurt straightened Sam’s tie just a little. They walked inside. Kurt put his bag on a table near the security guard in the room and gave his camera to the attendant.

They showed their IDs again and stepped up to the almost pulpit-like podium. Behind it on the wall was a circular plaque of the seal of Washington, DC. To the right was the Washington, DC flag and to the right was the US flag. A middle-aged gentleman stood behind the podium and began the ceremony. He read short fairly traditional, non-religious vows that Kurt and Sam repeated. They placed the rings on each other’s fingers at the appropriate time.

“I now declare you legally married in the District of Columbia. You may kiss.”

They kissed and then turned toward the attendant and wrapped their arms around each other’s waists and looked at her for another photo.

The court official signed their marriage license, and then gave them the pen for them to sign as well. He gave it to them afterwards. Kurt picked his bag back up and got his camera back.

They took the signed license back out to the area where they had been before and got in line again. They turned the license in and paid $20 to get two official copies of their marriage certificate. They sat back down to wait for their names to be called again.

“It’s done,” Sam said. “I’m married to the most amazing guy.”

“I have the most awesome husband. I love you so much.” He leaned forward and kissed Sam.

When their names were called, they went up to the clerk and picked up the copies of their marriage certificate. Kurt took it over to a table and sat it down and positioned his hand and Sam’s so that
their rings and names showed and took a few photos. Afterwards, Kurt put the certificates in the book he’d brought with him to keep them flat. They headed outside once he had it tucked away safely.

Once they were back outside, they stood with their left shoulders toward the courthouse with Kurt’s back against Sam’s chest, Sam’s arm around Kurt’s waist holding him close, and with their heads turned to the right. Kurt held his bag where it was out of the photo and Sam held the camera and took a few shots, and then used his phone to take a couple more that would be easy to show and send to people.

They headed straight to the Metro station to go back to the apartment. They grabbed the lunches they had made at breakfast and ate them quickly. They looked around one last time, grabbed their bags, and headed back to the subway to go to the airport.

Four hours later, at nearly 6:15, they put their bags in the backseat of Trish’s car and laid their suit jackets over the top. Kurt let Sam ride in front since he was taller.

“Well, how does it feel?”

“Like a whirlwind that’s not over quite yet,” Kurt said. “But it’s been a great day so far.”

She pulled out and headed to Lima.

“Sam?” she queried.

“Like Kurt said, awesome so far.” He pulled up one of the selfies he taken in front of the courthouse and showed it to her at a stoplight.

“Nice.”

“Thanks,” he said.

A little over an hour later, they pulled into the driveway. They grabbed their bags and jackets and headed upstairs to freshen up. They put one copy of the marriage certificate in the locked file box and left the other in a sleeve to take downstairs with them. Kurt slipped it onto one of the shelves in the living room to keep it from getting lost.

Kurt straightened Sam’s tie and his own after they got their suit jackets back on. They both wore Jerry Garcia ties that matched the color scheme, but were not identical.

Kurt, Sam, Carole, and Trish had made the mini-bouquet and magnetic boutonnieres from silk flowers so they could be done ahead of time. The flowers were a mix of deep red with burnt orange tips and deep orange with deep red tips. Sam loved bold vibrant colors and loved the deep orange flowers. Kurt chose his to coordinate. Their boutonnieres weren’t identical because they had each chosen which flowers to include in their own. Kurt had made the ring pillow cover out of a coordinating mostly black fabric and made a bow for the small bouquet from the same fabric.

Everyone was ready for them when they came down. They were sitting in the black wood chairs that had been set up in a semi-circle under at least 10 strings of white lights, criss-crossing the area above them. Since they weren’t actually having a legal ceremony, they had no need for an officiant, so the front area where they would eventually stand had a three-section, 7-foot tall black metal trellis that Carole had borrowed from the neighbor. It was artfully decorated with deep orange and red lilies.
Everyone in attendance was basically part of the wedding party, so they were all dressed in black and white. Kurt left their styles and patterns, if any, up to the individuals. Stevie was wearing black knee-length shorts and a white short-sleeved button up with small black dots. Stacey was wearing a white eyelot knee-length sundress, carrying the mini-bouquet of flowers, which also had the two boutonnières fastened to it. Rather than a traditional flower girl role of tossing flower petals out down the aisle, she was carrying the flowers for the grooms to put on each other.

Speakers had been set up and classical music played as they walked in. Stevie and Stacey walked in a few feet behind them.

They started behind Aunt Eunice, walked around the edge to the front and up to Kurt and Sam, who took the boutonnières first and put them on each other.

Next, they reached down and took the rings from the pillow and placed them in their right pockets. Stevie and Stacey went to sit in their seats. Kurt and Sam remained facing each other and joined their hands. Sebastian used a remote to fade the music and stop it once Kurt and Sam were ready to start.

When the music stopped, Kurt spoke. His voice was strong, but full of emotion. “Sam, you’re the best friend I’ve ever had and you’re everything I want in a husband. We’ve been through some really hard times together already.” A single teardrop managed to escape down Kurt’s check.

Sam instinctively reached up and wiped it away with his thumb and continued to smile at Kurt. He rejoined their hands.

“You stayed when you could have left.” Kurt’s expression turned more hopeful and he began to smile. “You make me laugh. You build me up when I’m down. You remind me to breathe when I forget. I promise to be faithful to you, to love you, and to trust you. I will put you before all others. I will care for you when you’re sick. I will support you when times are hard. I will cheer for you the loudest when you succeed. I will be your confidant and listen to you with compassion and understanding, and speak to you with encouragement. I choose to be your partner, best friend, lover, and accomplice in this crazy journey that we call life.”

“I choose you, Kurt, to be my husband – to stand by your side and sleep in your arms, to bring joy to your heart, to learn with you and to grow with you, even as life and time changes us both, to laugh with you in good times, and to comfort you in times of sickness or sorrow, and to be your closest friend. I promise to love you unconditionally, to walk steadfastly at your side, to always respect you, to trust you completely, and to listen carefully when you speak. May we have many great adventures and grow old together.”

They took the rings out of their pockets.

Kurt took Sam’s left hand with his own left hand. He slid the ring on Sam’s finger. “What was once a promise to commit myself to you now becomes the outward symbol of that commitment. Here, before these witnesses, I place this ring on your finger to symbolize the vows I’ve made to you today.”

They switched the positions of their left hands. Sam took the ring he was holding and slid it onto Kurt’s ring finger.

“What was once a promise to commit myself to you now becomes the outward symbol of that commitment. Here, before these witnesses, I place this ring on your finger to symbolize the vows I’ve made to you today.”
They reached towards each other, holding onto each other’s arms right above the elbow and kissed. Kurt slid his hands under Sam’s arms around his waist. Sam slipped his arms around Kurt’s lower back and they held each other for a little bit before stepping back a little, but they still leaned into each other enough that their foreheads were touching before they kissed gently one last time.

They turned and faced everyone and wrapped their arms around each other at the waist. They stood there smiling for a minute or so before Burt, Carole, Dwight, and Mary got up to hug them.

Aunt Eunice started taking group photos. She got a few of the six of them in a row. Next she moved Kurt and Sam closer to the trellis like they had been during the ceremony. She added Finn and Trish, seated in front of Kurt and Sam with Stevie and Stacey kneeling in front of them. Burt stood on Kurt’s side. Carole stood in front of him slightly offset to the center. Dwight and Mary positions mirrored Burt and Carole’s.

For a photo of all of them she set her camera up to use her remote. She had the back row comprised of Dylan, Sebastian, Kurt, Sam, Jeff, and Nick. The front row had five chairs centered. Burt, Carole, Aunt Eunice, Mary, and Dwight sat in the chairs. Stevie and Stacey stood one on each side behind Aunt Eunice and Finn and Trish knelt in front of her to create an inverse pyramid shape to the group.

Once she was sure the group photos had come out okay, she let them all get up and start setting up the tables to eat while she took more photos of Kurt and Sam together.

“Your vows were beautiful,” she said as she positioned them to get some good bust shots.

“Thanks,” Sam said.

Kurt said, “Thank you. And thanks for doing our photos.”

“You’re welcome. I really enjoy doing it, but I found that I didn’t enjoy the stress of stressed out people getting bent out of shape because I’m not a miracle worker or invisible.”

Kurt laughed. “People want fantastic photos taken from places there’s nowhere to stand or take them without being seen.”

“You got it. When I was young like the two of you, I was much more able to be a contortionist. Now, there’s no way.” She continued to photograph them. Getting them to talk and relax helped the photos come out a lot more natural looking.

“You’re staying the weekend and going with us tomorrow, right?” Sam asked?

“Oh, definitely. It sounds fun. Painting with unusual objects sounds just like my cup of tea. The more abstract it’s supposed to be, the more likely what I paint will look like I did a good job.” She laughed at herself.

“If you want to join in on what we’re doing you can,” Sam said.

“And what’s that, honey?”

“We’re going with black, lime green, and accents of red as our color scheme. We’re both going to make ours with the same three colors, and then however they turn out, we’re hanging them together in our office on a wall together as a set. If you don’t want to hang yours at your place, you can use the same colors and it can join ours on display to make our office more fun and colorful.”

“Tilt your head a little towards Sam,” she said to Kurt. “Yes, like that.” She took a few more
shots. “I’d love to join in on your decorating.” She finished up the photos and they went and sat down at the tables that had been set up.

The others had moved the black wooden chairs up to the deck and sat them up to long folding table Burt had borrowed and that had been covered with a black tablecloth.

Sam and Kurt sat at the head together, even though it was tight fit. They were cozy and happy. The dads made toasts and food was passed around and everyone served themselves. Everyone talked and laughed. They ate and enjoyed the food, as well as the company.

Once they finished eating, Jeff brought his guitar out. Kurt stood and sang to Sam, with Jeff accompanying him. It was the song he had sung the night he proposed to Sam.

_Every time our eyes meet_  
This feeling inside me  
Is almost more than I can take  
When you touch me  
I can feel how much you love me  
And it just blows me away

_I’ve never been this close to anyone or anything_  
I can hear your thoughts  
I can see your dreams

_I don’t know how you do what you do_  
I’m so in love with you  
It just keeps getting better  
I wanna spend the rest of my life  
With you by my side  
Forever and ever  
Every little thing that you do  
I’m amazed by you

_The smell of your skin_  
The taste of your kiss  
The way you whisper in the dark  
Your hair all around me  
The way you surround me  
You touch every place in my heart

_Oh, it feels like the first time every time_  
I wanna spend the whole night in your eyes

_Every little thing that you do_  
I’m so in love with you  
It just keeps getting better  
I wanna spend the rest of my life  
With you by my side  
Forever and ever  
Every little thing that you do  
I’m amazed by you

When he finished, he hugged Sam. “I love you.” He kissed him gently.
Finn handed Sam his guitar and the special pick he still used. He stood and serenaded Kurt next.

It sure is good to see your smile  
At the end of a long hard day  
Life out there is easier to bear  
When you look at me this way

I can't count the times  
You dance through my mind  
While I'm tryin' to be who I am  
But you got to believe  
I'm not really me  
'Til I'm back in your arms again

'Cause it all comes clear  
When we're both right here  
And you lay your heart next to mine

I'll never get used to those short goodbyes  
As I'm runnin' out the door  
And I'll always hate walkin' away  
While you're tryin' to kiss me once more

But I've got to do what I've got to do  
And even when it don't go like I plan<  
I tell myself, if there's nothin' else  
When every day comes to an end

It will be all right  
When you hold me tight  
And you lay your heart next to mine

Every beat  
Every breath  
That I have you here with me  
Is worth all the rest, oh yes  
And every dream  
In my mind  
Comes alive every night, every time

And the world stands still  
That's the way it feels  
When you lay your heart next to mine  
Come and lay your heart next to mine

Kurt stepped into Sam’s arms and held him close. “That was beautiful. I love you.”

What Kurt and Sam didn’t know is that Nick, Jeff, Dylan, Sebastian, Finn, and Trish planned to sing for them. Jeff played a guitar accompaniment. Trish led them to the center of the canopy of lights in the yard. She walked back and joined the circle that had formed around them.

We hope the days come easy and the moments pass slow  
And each road leads you where you want to go  
And if you’re faced with the choice and you have to choose
We hope you choose the one that means the most to you
And if one door opens to another door closed
We hope you keep on walkin’ ‘til you find the window
If it’s cold outside, show the world the warmth of your smile
But more than anything, more than anything

Our wish for you
Is that this life becomes all that you want it to
Your dreams stay big, your worries stay small
You never need to carry more than you can hold
And while you’re out there gettin’ where you’re gettin’ to
We hope you know somebody loves you
And wants the same things too
Yeah, this is our wish

We hope you never look back but you never forget
All the ones who love you
And the place you left
We hope you always forgive and you never regret
And you help somebody every chance you get
That you find forgiveness after every mistake
And always give more than you take
But more than anything, yeah more than anything

Our wish for you
Is that this life becomes all that you want it to
Your dreams stay big, your worries stay small
You never need to carry more than you can hold
And while you’re out there gettin’ where you’re gettin’ to
We hope you know somebody loves you
And wants the same things too
Yeah, this is our wish
This is our wish

Both Kurt and Sam were crying by the time they finished. All six of them hugged both of them. When they had gotten their emotions under control, they had the music start for their first dance. They wanted something fun an upbeat, so they chose Colbie Caillat’s “You Got Me”. About halfway through the song, everyone else joined in and started to dance. After about a half-hour, the music on their play list ended.

The cake was brought out and they cut it together and fed each other bites. They sliced it up and passed pieces out for everyone to enjoy. The table was cleared and some gifts were placed in front of them.

Carole said, “We know you weren’t expecting any gifts, but I couldn’t dissuade them.”

Kurt shook his head and Sam laughed. They opened the gifts. They got a nice toaster oven, a coffee pot, a mini coffee grinder, a blender, a mixer, and a food processor – all in black.

After they opened them, Carole said, “Their arguments for us equipping your kitchen ranged from ‘They can make us stuff.’ to ‘You know how much they like to cook’.”

Sam and Kurt both smiled and nodded their heads knowingly.
“Thank you,” Kurt said. “We will enjoy using them and making things for ourselves and other people.”

“Thanks. That was really nice of all of you,” Sam said.

“We’re going to start cleaning up and you two can head on up. I’m sending the kids down to watch a movie and fall asleep. Their pajamas are down there already. We’ll all be ready to go to Toledo tomorrow morning,” Mary said. She hugged both of them again. “Congratulations.”

Sam held on for an extra couple of seconds. “Thanks, Mom.”

Sam grabbed his guitar on their way up.

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Kurt and Sam hung their suits to take to the cleaners after wearing them on the subway three times and on the flight and out in the yard all evening. Sam had a huge smile on his face.

“What’s so funny?”

“My mom trying to make it really clear that no one would be up to bother us for a while without just saying so.”


Sam stepped closer and wrapped his arms around Kurt and kissed him passionately. “There’s the kiss I wanted to give you downstairs, but that wasn’t the time or place for it.”

“Now’s a good time.” Kurt reattached his lips and kissed Sam. “How about a massage?”

“Sounds perfect. I’ll get the lights and music and you can get the other things we’ll definitely need by the end of the massage.”

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“So…” Sam said, snuggled up on Kurt’s chest after they had gotten out of the shower.

“So?” Kurt replied.

“So, did it turn out like you hoped?”

“It was beautiful. The ceremony part under canopy of lights at dusk, and then the dinner and dancing under the lights at night. I loved it. Did you like it?”

“The lights were beautiful. It was perfect. There was me and you and our friends and family and you made me the happiest man by marrying me.” He kissed Kurt. “Metxe’lan ‘awsteng mi time’em.”

“What does that mean?”

“Two hearts together in harmony.”

“That’s beautiful. Say it again.”

“Metxe’lan ‘awsteng mi time’em.”
Kurt woke up early the next morning.

“Good morning, handsome,” Kurt said.

“Mmf,” was all he got out of Sam.

“But I’ve had an inspired artistic idea and I need my handsome artist husband to wake up and talk to me about it.”

“Mmm. I like the husband part.”

“Me too.” He kissed the top of Sam’s head. “Dad said we can take the old couch from our old house that’s in the music room downstairs. And that we can take the piano too.”

“Mmm hmm. I remember.”

“Well, I think that it would be a lot of fun to go get twelve 8’x10’ canvases and prime them a nice neutral taupe. When we come back everyone can all use their newfound artistic skills and paint one 8’x10’ canvas horizontally, except Aunt Eunice because she’s joining us at the museum to make one. We get a small tube of warm medium brown, a nice burnt orange and crimson. We have everyone who came to our wedding paint one. Completely abstract, random, geometric or whatever, but no attempts at actually painting something that will definitely not turn out to be whatever it was supposed to be. Later we’ll get twelve wood frames from Dollar Tree and we’ll construct a 3x4 grid and hang it on the short wall that we’re painting the accent color.”

“Have you ever actually tried turning your brain off?” Sam teased. “Does your poor brain even get to rest while you sleep? You wake up with these awesome ideas.” Sam kissed his neck. “I like your idea, a lot. We’ll go to Michaels as soon as it opens, and we can prime all twelve canvases before we go. I’ll do one more 11x17 canvas for Aunt Eunice before we go to Michaels so it will be ready when we leave for Toledo.”

“Thank you!” Kurt nearly bounced in the bed. He kissed Sam on top of the head again.

“You’re welcome. You’re completely adorable when you’re excited. Do we have time to keep cuddling or do we need to get up?”

“The store opens in an hour and a half.”

“More cuddles then.” Sam pressed his nose into Kurt’s shoulder and kissed him on the neck. “We can still talk if you want. I’m just going to do it from right here.”

They enjoyed their time at the museum, creating art with things like brooms, sponges, and fans. And everyone loved seeing the glass blowing demonstration. From there they headed to Maumee Bay State Park for the rest of the afternoon. They picnicked, hiked, went swimming in the lake, and lay around on the beach.

Nick, Jeff, Sebastian, and Dylan followed them back to Lima to participate in Kurt’s wedding guest art project.

While everyone was painting, Aunt Eunice took more photos. Kurt took their marriage license off the shelf and took it to the dining room to show everyone. “I brought it down last night to show
everyone, and then I didn’t end up doing it.”

Burt stopped what he was doing to look at it. “One day that will be accepted everywhere. I’m going to keep working at it.”

Kurt nodded. “I know. I’m glad you’re trying to make a difference.”

“I’m not sure this is going to be able to be considered art,” Burt said.

“Just paint it with love and it will be perfect,” Kurt said, and smiled and winked at him as he walked off to show everyone else their marriage certificate.

About a half-hour later, everyone had declared their pieces done. They left them lay on the newspaper to dry.

“Thank you,” Kurt said. “For everything. For supporting us, and coming to the wedding last night, and to the museum and the beach today. It might not have been a traditional wedding and reception, but we loved it.”

Sam added, “And thanks for making these paintings. Whether you think they’re any good or not, they’ll be a physical reminder of the people who love us hanging on our wall for us to look at.”

Nick, Jeff, Sebastian, and Dylan all talked to Kurt and Sam for a little in the living room while before they left. Kurt and Sam carefully took all of the paintings upstairs and put them on their table to finish drying after they left.

Mary, Carole, and Aunt Eunice worked on making dinner. Burt and Dwight returned the things they had rented and borrowed for the wedding. Finn and Trish played out back with the kids.

After they finished eating and cleaning up, Mary and Dwight took the kids upstairs to make sure they took baths and got ready for bed. The kids stayed upstairs and watched a movie on Finn’s TV and fell asleep on the air mattress.

Kurt and Sam whipped eggs, while Trish, Aunt Eunice, and Carole prepped by cooking the meat for the breakfast casseroles. Burt and Finn sat at the island and talked to them. After they finished with their egg task, Kurt pulled on Sam’s hand and went around to the foyer and stood against the coat closet and pulled Sam closer and started kissing him.

“Kissing intermission?” He managed to say between kisses.

“Mmm hmm.”

Once everyone else had finished what they were doing, Kurt heard Carole call their names, they came around from the foyer, and she laughed quietly, shook her head, and winked at them.

“We’re going down to watch the movie.”

“Okay,” Kurt said.

Kurt curled into Sam’s side Sunday night. “Having them here to visit so close together makes it hard when they go again.” He gently stroked the side of Sam’s face.
“It does. But with them getting the internet turned on again it’s easier now. Seeing them makes it better.”

“She looked adorable in the white eyelet dress with the bunny backpack.”

“She did.”

“Going to the movie theater this morning was fun. And I’ll have to thank Finn for buying the Slip ‘n Slides. That was a fantastic addition to this afternoon’s fun.”

“It was.”

“This was the antithesis of a traditional honeymoon, but I loved every minute of it. I wouldn’t trade it for running off to Florida by ourselves for two days.”

“Me neither. But running off to Florida with you for a few days does sound fun.”

“We can add it to our list of things we want to do.”

“Mmm hmm. Right now, I just want to kiss and snuggle my gorgeous husband.”

“That’s it.” Sam put their sandwiches and bag of baby carrots in his seat and their drinks in the cup holders. He walked around to the back and looked in the cargo area with Kurt. It had the tent, the air mattress, two camping chairs, the big cooler, a duffle with work clothes and old shoes, along with their toiletries.

“Yep. I think we’ve got everything.” He shut the door. He turned to Sam before he stepped away. He wrapped his arms around him and kissed him. “Now, we just need to go meet Nick and Jeff.”

“Let’s get going.” Kurt gave him one last quick kiss before he let go of him.

Kurt popped a carrot into his mouth as he pulled out of the driveway. A few minutes later, they pulled up to the meet-up point. Kurt ate his sandwich while Sam got out and put the back seat down so that Nick could climb into the third row. Jeff passed their air mattress and bags to him so he could stack everything behind the seat. He added their food to the cooler. Once Jeff had passed everything back, Nick climbed out, and they both got into the backseat.

“All set,” Jeff said.

An hour and a half later, Kurt pulled up to Dylan’s place. He and Sebastian got in and they continued on their journey. They pulled into Aunt Eunice’s driveway a little after 9:00. She was sitting on the front porch waiting for them. They grabbed their bags and got out.

“Good evening, boys. It’s good to see all of you again.”

“You too,” Kurt said. “Thanks for letting us stay with you.”

“Of course, honey. You and your friends are always welcome.”

They followed her in and ran their bags upstairs and came back down.

“I have the oven preheated and I got one of those big pizzas from Sam’s Club to put in, if one of you would go do that.”

“Sure,” Sam said. He went in the kitchen.

“I’ll get the movie loaded.” Kurt put *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* in the DVD player and let the trailers play. When Sam came back, Kurt hit play. They paused it when the pizza came out and continued to watch while they ate. Once it was finished everyone headed to bed.

Kurt turned his phone alarm off and scooted back into Sam’s arms again. Sam kissed the back of his neck.

“Mmm. That feels nice.” He took Sam’s hand and kissed his knuckles. “Ready to go riding?”

“Now there’s a good idea.”
“I have lots of good ideas, but the one you’re thinking of is kind of hard to pull off while being complete quiet, plus we don’t have what we need for that. I could do something else though.”

“Definitely.”

Kurt and Sam made omelettes while the others set the table, made toast, and poured juice for everyone. Once they ate and cleaned up, they dumped everything for the soup into the crockpot, and then they headed out to the stables. They saddled the horses and took them out. After they finished riding, they took turns on the 4-wheelers.

When they came back, the other four found shirts laid out for them on their beds.

“Are these to wear now?” Jeff called out.

“After we shower, yeah. We thought they’d be fun,” Kurt answered.

They all showered quickly, put jeans, boots, and the t-shirts on afterwards. Nick and Jeff had showered first, so they were the first downstairs. They got bowls out and ladled out the soup. Once they were all sitting down, Aunt Eunice came in from the back.

“Join us?” Kurt said. “There’s plenty.”

“Sure, honey.” She grabbed a bowl and ladled some soup into it. “I’ve seen the sweatshirts, but not these t-shirts.”

“Kurt and I made them. It’s just for fun. It’s PRIDE weekend in Columbus, which is where we’re going tomorrow. We made them in a rainbow of colors.”

She looked around. Kurt was wearing a deep crimson red. Sam was in burnt orange. Nick was in Star Trek gold. Jeff was in a jungle green shirt. Sebastian’s was a warm medium blue. Dylan’s was in a deep regal violet shirt. Each of them had 221B in their partner’s t-shirt color on their shirts.

“They are fun. Have you been to PRIDE before?”

Nick said, “Kurt, Sam, Jeff, and I went last year. Sebastian and Dylan weren’t here yet.” He told her about the parade.

“You’re going on the Safari today, then?” she asked.

“Yes,” Jeff said. “I’m excited. It’s great weather for it.”

She said, “It is. I went once a while back and I had a good time. I’m sure you will all enjoy it.”

They continued to chitchat while they ate. They loaded the dishwasher and turned it on before they left.

Kurt was bouncing up on to his toes and Jeff was fidgeting about, unable to hold still. They boarded the white open-top school bus. It had a canopy to keep the sun from beating down on them. They took seats in the back and waited for everyone else to board.

The bus took off into the wildlife park. They drove on a path through tall grass. Once they drove
out a little ways, all they could see was grass, hills, trees, lakes here and there, and the amazing animals. The immensity of the area with nothing but nature on all sides really did make the trip feel like a safari.

Ostriches walked right up to the bus. They all managed to touch one of them. They got to feed the giraffes romaine lettuce leaves.

“Oh, my God,” Kurt said as the giraffe stuck its tongue out to try to get the lettuce from him. “She has a huge tongue.” He laughed and fed her. He reached out and touched the side of her face. “She’s amazing.”

The others fed her too, getting a chance to stroke the side of her face.

“She’s beautiful,” Sam said.

They took pictures of each other and even managed one selfie of all of them and the giraffe.

They saw Grevy’s zebras, southern white rhinoceroses, Sichuan takins, scimitar-horned and fringe-eared oryxes, sable antelopes, Przewalski’s wild horses, Persian onagers, greater one-horned Asian rhinos, cheetahs, several types of deer, dholes, bantengs, camels, African painted dogs, and a few trumpeter swans.

The safari lasted two and a half hours and they all enjoyed every minute of it. They didn’t really talk that much during the safari because they were all busy looking at the amazing scenery and the animals and listening to their safari guide tell them all about the animals.

When it ended, they went hiking through the area that had been planted with flora that attracted butterflies. They walked along slowly in pairs carefully looking around to see the different types that were in the area.

Sam said, “Those dholes were sooo cute. I’d never heard of one before today, but if they were domesticated, I would want to get a couple.”

“They were adorable,” Kurt said. “One day, we’re going to get a couple of dogs, right?”

“Of course.” He squeezed Kurt’s hand.

Kurt looked towards him and Sam kissed him.

Dylan said, “Hold still, Nick.”

He stopped “What?”

“There’s a huge monarch on back up near your shoulder.”

They all stepped closer to look at it and Jeff got a good close up photo of it. Sebastian got it to climb up on his finger. He let Nick see it.

“Does anyone else want to hold it?” Sebastian offered.

Dylan put his finger out and got it to climb on his finger instead. “We don’t have these in Europe.” After looking at it carefully, he put it down on a flower.

They turned to make their wake back towards the parking area.

Kurt asked, “What was everyone the most surprised about?”
Jeff answered first. “The website gave the size, but it was in acres, which didn’t mean a lot to me. I knew it was big, but it’s huge. It’s like being out in Africa or out in the west where there’s so much empty space. I didn’t think about there being somewhere in Ohio that had that much space with no people living in it.”

“I saw the animals on the website,” Nick said. “But I didn’t realize that all of them were really living year round out there.”

Dylan said, “I was surprised by the whole thing because honestly, I didn’t look anything up about it. I knew Kurt wouldn’t plan anything boring or stupid, so I just came expecting to have a good time. And it was really amazing.”

“I didn’t look into it either for pretty much the same reason as Dylan, but I think how much effort they’re putting into conservation and making sure that some of those animals continue to thrive when their native habitats are being destroyed or they’re being hunted for interfering in areas that humans are trying to develop or already live in,” Sebastian said.

“I thought it was really cool when the guide said that they have five generations of rhinos living here,” Kurt said.

“I still stick with my love of those dholes. I really, really would like two of them,” Sam said. “They’re the most surprising part because I had never heard of them before.”

They all climbed back into the Navigator and drove the 35 minutes back to Zanesville. They stopped at the donut shop and bought donut holes, and then went and ordered subs, including one for Aunt Eunice and took everything back to her place for dinner.

When they knocked on the door, Aunt Eunice opened it to let them in. Kurt handed her the bag of donut holes.

“You little rascal. I can’t let you come if you’re going to make me lose my willpower to stay away from that place,” she teased. She opened the bag and popped one into her mouth. “Oh, good. There’s only a half dozen.”

“We each ate one on the way here. The sign said ‘By the dozen.’”

“I know. That’s why I have to avoid the place. I don’t need a dozen donut holes all to myself.” She followed them into the kitchen.

They got the sandwiches and sides out of the bags and sat down. Sebastian handed Aunt Eunice her bag.

“Merci.”

“Il n’y a pas de quoi,” Sebastian said automatically.

“I took French in school back in the dark ages. I’m certain that my teacher had never met anyone who actually spoke French.”

Sebastian laughed. “I had some English teachers who did not appreciate my expert input.”

Aunt Eunice laughed as well. “I’m sure you did. Nothing worse that a snot-nosed 9 year old correcting your pronunciation or grammar.”
“Well, they had no excuse. It’s not like England is that far from Paris. They could have gone and taken a summer course. It would be like going to Kentucky for the summer.”

“Fair point. So, what’s on the agenda for this fine evening?”

Kurt answered, “Well, we were planning on board games for a couple of hours, and then going to sleep. We wanted to go out riding again before we leave for Columbus around 10:00. The parade starts at noon, but we’ll need to find a place and walk to the parade route.”

“Sounds good to me. Maybe I’ll go some time. I’ve thought about it a lot of times, but never had the nerve to do it.”

“Well, maybe Carole will go with us next year and we can take some chairs and set up early along the route where you can get a front row seat.”

“I’ll think about it. I’ll just always be grateful that my parents didn’t react like that poor boy David you sent here to stay for a while. How people can just throw their kids away is just beyond me. He’s still fighting his own demons, but he’s not an evil monster. When you’ve seen as much as I’ve seen, it’s easy to see he was a scared kid that made a lot of bad choices when no good ones were available to him. That doesn’t justify his bad choices because he could have made better ones, but … I’ll just stop. The whole topic makes me feel sick.”

No one said anything for a few minutes.

“David came here the night before graduation and spent the night, and then drove me there as a thank you for letting him stay until he could get on his feet. He went to the school early that morning and met his dad and the principal. He put on his cap and gown and got his diploma. He gave me an empty SD card before we left. I took photos of him getting his diploma and a few of him using the backdrop the photographers had already set up on the stage wing. I took a few of him and his dad discreetly without his dad noticing when the two of them were talking to the principal before I walked him over to the backdrop that had been set up in the wings. I have a view screen on the back so I can use it instead of the regular viewfinder. I gave him the SD card back before he left. His dad didn’t see that part either. He thinks I was one of the photographers the school hired. I didn’t speak to the three of them other than posing Dave against the backdrop. I just stood around out of the way, like photographers do. Afterwards, I stayed in the building. The principal walked him out to his truck and stayed a few minutes to make sure his dad didn’t follow him when he left. After they were both gone, she gave me a ride to the corner at the end of your street. I walked up the block the few houses, Mary let me in, and that was that. I have all of the pictures from your wedding done.”

“Really? That was fast,” Kurt said.

“Well, I took the SD card up to Sam’s Club and burned all of the good photos onto DVDs. You can use your fancy shmancy computer to do whatever you want to them.”

Sam said, “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, honey.”

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They got the games out and broke up into groups playing different ones. Kurt, Jeff, Sam, and Sebastian played Trouble. They finished before the other three. While they were waiting for Nick and Dylan to finish their game, Sam browned sausage and Jeff cut up onions and peppers. Kurt and
Sebastian went out on the front porch.

They sat down together on the porch swing. Neither one of them said anything at first.

"The day you walked into the Lima Bean and sat down with me and I realized who you were, we seemed to hit it off again right away. It was this blast from my past before things were so bad and you being here this school year has been so much fun. I’m going to miss you so much."

"I know I’m usually a smart ass, but I’ll refrain from making jokes. I’m going to miss you too. I thought this would be the most boring 10 months of my life. I don’t dislike my dad or anything, but I couldn’t think of anything that could make spending 10 months in rural Ohio anything but exceptionally dreadful. And then I walked into the Lima Bean and saw you sitting at a table alone. I admit my first thought was to hit on you and see if you were gay. I had hopes because you certainly were dressed much nicer than any other guys I had seen. And then after a few minutes, we figured it out. And it’s been a great 9 months since then. I came here with zero expectations for anything positive and I found you and Dylan. Me, the king of ‘fuck and chuck,’ as I’ve heard it called in English, fell in love and I renewed the only real friendship I’d ever had. There’s a group of guys I played sports with and ran around with in Paris, but none of them are the ‘have your back when things are hard’ type. They’re more like long-time acquaintances – guys that run in the same dance club crowd.” He took a deep breath and sighed. “And now the day I thought I would be marking off days on my calendar in anticipation of getting to go back to the life I had, doesn’t feel that way at all. I want to keep Dylan and the four of you, but especially you and Sam, and take you with me. I want to keep having these wild and crazy adventures you plan for us. A safari in Ohio? How is that even possible? You’ve come up with so many fun things for us to do together and I’m going to miss you so much.”

"It’s been a wild 9 months for me. I’ve loved all of the fun things we’ve done and the laid back things like watching Sherlock and movies together and the times where we’ve just talked. I’ve learned a lot about myself and other people. Please don’t forget me when you get back to Paris. I know life there is more interesting than it is here. Skype me, okay? You could come back next summer for a while. You and Dylan could stay with us in Lima some of the time and in Kent some of the time. Or we can drive to DC and you can fly there for a couple of weeks and we can stay in my parents’ apartment. Either way, you wouldn’t have to pay for a place to stay. Think about it, okay?"

"I will. Going home is a lot harder than I thought it would be. I never expected more than being able to barely tolerate it here, and now I love being here with you and my dad and our friends. I do miss Maman and Paris. It’s just really hard."

"Maybe we can save up too. I’m not sure how, but maybe we can come up with a way to come to Paris and see you. I’ve always wanted to go."

"You can stay with us, if you figure out a way to come. You know Maman would love to see you. Dylan’s moving in with me. Maman is fine with it. She’s actually thrilled. Thrilled is probably an understatement."

Kurt laughed.

"She sent you here to get your head on straight and consider your life choices and you’re coming home with a serious boyfriend who loves you enough to go to college in Paris instead of London."

"Exactly. She sent me to rural Ohio and I’m coming home with a serious British boyfriend." He laughed.
“Dylan’s a really good guy. I’m happy for the two of you.”

“I’m happy for me too. I never, ever thought I would want to have sex with the same person forever. And I considered falling in love to be something that other people did. But it turns out I was wrong, which is something I don’t admit that often. I was wrong about Ohio and I was wrong about love.”

“I’m so glad you came.”

“Me too.”

They sat in silence, barely swinging for a while before they got up, hugged, and went back inside.

They played a variety of games over the course of the evening, but none of them managed to best Aunt Eunice at Monopoly.

Saturday morning they got up early again. Kurt went downstairs, mixed the casserole ingredients together, put it in the oven, and set time timer on his phone. Sam pulled their sheets off the bed, grabbed their clothes, took them down, and started the laundry while Kurt was working on breakfast. While the washer was going and the casserole was in the oven, Kurt and Sam went out back and walked through the woods.

“We came out here about a year ago,” Kurt said.

“We did. I remember you telling me that it felt like a fairy tale or something you imagined.” He stopped and wrapped his arms around Kurt. “A lot has happened in a year.” He kissed him.

Kurt slipped his arms around Sam as well. “There’ve been villains, and nuisances, and friends, and successes, and accomplishments, and you made my dreams come true, so it might be a fairy tale, and you’re my ever after. We can hope for the ‘happily’ part, but we already know we can be there for each other during the not so happy parts. I love you so much.” He started to slow dance and he started to sing, but then picked up the pace and started to be silly. He sang the first verse and then Sam started to sing the second verse.

*What I want, you’ve got.*
*And it might be hard to handle.*
*But like the flame that burns the candle,*
*The candle feeds the flame.*

*What I’ve got’s full stock*
*Of thoughts and dreams that scatter.*
*Then you pull them all together.*
*And how I can’t explain.*

They sang the chorus together, with Kurt doing the echoing background part.

*Well, well you, (ooh-hoo, hoo-ooh, ooh-hoo)*
*You make my dreams come true. (You-hoo, you, you-hoo, hoo, you-hoo)*
*Well, well you, (You-hoo, hoo-hoo-ooh)*
*Oh, yeah, you make my dreams come true. (You make my dreams)*
*Come true (You-hoo, you, you-hoo, hoo, you-hoo)*

They sang the next verse together.
On a night when bad dreams become a screamer,
When they’re messin’ with the dreamer,
I can laugh it in the face.
Twist and shout my way out,
And you wrap yourself around me.
‘Cause I ain’t the way you found me.
And I’ll never be the same.

They repeated the chorus the way they had sung it the first time.

They crashed back into each other smiling and laughing and hugging.

“You’re so much fun. I love you,” Sam said.

Kurt slowly backed Sam into a tree and leaned in and kissed him breathless. Sam pulled him flush against him and started to kiss down Kurt’s neck.

“Just a second.” Kurt took his phone out and texted Nick to get the casserole out in 20 minutes. “Come on.” Kurt took Sam’s hand and led him to the bathroom in the stables. No one else was on the farm yet, so they wouldn’t be seen.

Once they were there, Kurt pulled Sam’s shirt off over his head and hung it on the back of the door and took his own off quickly. He backed Sam into the door and began kissing him and running his hands along Sam’s arms and then his chest. “Yes?”

“Yes.” Sam reached down and undid his jeans.

Kurt had already beaten him to it with his own. He stepped closer and pressed Sam into the door again and started kissing up his neck. He kissed along his jaw, and then licked at Sam’s lips and began kissing him passionately.

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Nick wagged his eyebrows at Kurt when he stepped into the kitchen through the back door. Nick had already served the casserole to the other three that were already sitting around the table and was sitting down with his own piece.

Sebastian teased, “We wondered when you’d be back. Nick got us up when the food was done.”

Kurt and Sam walked over to the counter and served their portions and sat down with everyone. He continued to rib them. “It’s good to know that getting married doesn’t kill your libido.”

Kurt stuck his tongue out at Sebastian.

He chortled. “Oh, God. You never had the nerve to do that to me when we were kids. I’m sure I deserved it plenty times. Why did you even put up with me?”

“You know why. You might have been a pain in the ass, but you were my pain in the ass. Maybe you don’t remember, but I do. You put the kids who teased me in their place many, many times. I was so small, but you were always tall for your age. You stood up for me and told them that I was your friend and I was cool.”

“Well, that’s still true. You are my friend and you are cool. And you did eventually grow.”
Kurt laughed. “I did. When I was 16 and a half.”

The washer buzzed. Kurt got up and moved the stuff to the dryer.

Jeff and Dylan got up and went up and grabbed the sheets like Kurt had asked them to the night before. They brought them down and put them in the washer and Kurt started it again. They all three sat back down.

Kurt said, “Horse riding, then showers, and then we’ll head to Columbus. We’ll remake the beds during the showers, so we don’t leave Aunt Eunice with a lot of work. We’ll throw the towels in the washer and at least get them washing before we go. That will just leave her with the load of towels to fold.”

“Right,” Sam said. “We’ll stop and get gas and more ice for the cooler on the way through Zanesville.”

The other four did the dishes while Kurt and Sam finished.

They washed and dried their plates quickly, and then put them away.

Two and a half hours later, they had followed their plan and they were ready to leave. They said their goodbyes and got their hugs. They climbed into the Navigator and headed towards Zanesville. After the brief stop, they were back on the highway to Columbus.

“I love how our shirts turned out,” Jeff said.

“Us too,” Dylan said. “Thanks for doing them.”

“You’re welcome,” Sam said.

Dylan and Sebastian had liked what Kurt and Sam had done the previous year, and they wanted the same thing, but in French. They bought shirts they liked and gave them to Kurt and Sam to paint. Dylan’s shirt was a deep cornflower blue and Sebastian’s was black. They painted “L’amour” in cursive in the opposite colors on the front across the chest like they had done with their own.

Nick and Jeff hadn’t ended up buying shirts the year before, but had looked online and found one that had sparked their idea. They ended up getting gray and maroon shirts. They had Kurt and Sam paint them with opposite colors as well, but on the front of Jeff’s it said, “He’s mine.” And on the back it said, “I’m his.” Nick’s was the opposite. The one they had seen online was a set for a guy and a girl and they guy’s shirt said, “She’s mine.” on both sides, while the girl’s shirt said, “I’m his.” on both sides. They didn’t like the single-sided possessiveness, so they had theirs done with both expressions on each shirt.

Kurt and Sam wore the ones they had made the previous year.

They found a place to park and walked to the area they had picked to watch the parade from. When it ended, the browsed through the vendor and exhibitor areas.

“I’m getting us these,” Sebastian said. He picked up six identical keychains and paid for them.

After they walked out of the booth, they followed him behind it and stood between it and the wall a few feet away. He handed them out. On one end they had a traditional round key ring. Fastened to it was a stainless center section, which was about 2cm wide by 5cm long that had a 7-stripe
rainbow pattern painted into engraved stripes. The back had two male interlocking symbols facing in opposite directions, due to the long, narrow space. The other end had a stainless lobster claw swivel clasps on it.

“These are great,” Sam said. He removed the ring that came on it and fastened his key ring onto the end rather than moving his keys. “That spacer in the middle and the lobster clasp lets you fasten them to your belt loop and the keys still be in your pocket. Nice.”

Jeff said, “I can fasten it to my backpack too. Thanks.”

“I like it too. Thanks, Bas.”

Once they had all finished messing with the keychains, they moved back out into the vendor area and looked around a little longer. They left the area to go to the Gazebo Stage to listen to the Gay Men’s Chorus sing for about a half hour.

From there they left to meet up with Liam and Mark at The Village Coney for one last all-American meal together. On their way out, Kurt grabbed a second official Pride guide to mail to Aunt Eunice so she could see the types of events that took place.

They loved the fun atmosphere and delicious food at The Village Coney. They said their goodbyes outside the restaurant. Sebastian followed Kurt to the Navigator to get his and Dylan’s bags out of the back.

Kurt folded the backseat forward and Sebastian climbed in and grabbed their bags. Kurt put the seat back into position. Sebastian sat the bags back down and pulled Kurt into a hug. Neither of them was dry-eyed by the time Sebastian let go. He grabbed the bags and walked back towards the others. The three teens were already headed towards the Navigator.

When they got there, Sam got in the driver’s seat and they started on their way to Kent. Kurt sat in the passenger seat, tears streaming down his face.

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By the time they reached the north edge of Columbus, Kurt had managed to get himself back together enough to drive. He and Sam switched positions and he drove north on 71. He pulled off the highway to go to Costco. They went inside and bought more food for the next two days. They packed the perishable stuff in the cooler and put everything else in the third row seats in a box they had packed everything in before they came out.

Kurt turned north again and continued on 71. When they got near the exit to the outlet mall, Kurt pointed it out. “That’s where will be coming before school starts so the two of you can outfit yourselves for less than a small fortune.”

“Sounds good to me,” Nick said. “I’d like to get decent quality stuff, but I’m good with stuff from last season or whatever season. It’s not like Levi’s have changed that much. And button-ups are button-ups. Hoodies are hoodies. I’d like to look good, but labels don’t matter to me.”

Kurt said, “Well you all know I love fashion, but I can’t afford the big-name labels. I tailor a lot of stuff to make it fit me better and that goes a long way to making the items look like designer pieces. Every model in a magazine has had something done to what they have on or it was designed to fit them to start with. No one in a fashion shoot is wearing the clothing directly off the rack, no matter the designer or retail price.”

“So, that’s their secret,” Jeff said.
“It is indeed. We have about another hour and 45 minutes, in case anyone wondered.”

Jeff said, “I downloaded Metric’s new album *Synthetica* when it was released Tuesday. We could listen to it.”

“Sure,” Kurt said. “I’m not familiar with the band, but as long as it’s not super heavy metal or screamo, I’m good. Those two genres have a time and place, which isn’t while I’m driving on a road I’ve never driven before going 65 miles per hour.”

“It’s not. I think you’ll like it.” He selected it on his phone and handed it to Sam to plug into the stereo.

Sam started it and they listened as they rode. When it finished, he started it over.

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Kurt pulled up and parked in front of the house. They all got out and went to look for Jerry. They found him along the side of the house.

“Hey, boys. We’ve got this double window, the front door, and patio door going in right now. We had to wait for the masonry to set from bricking over the area where the garage door used to be and from removing the bricks from the area where the patio door is going on the back and where this double window is.

“You did a nice job matching the bricks. I’m sure that’s tough sometimes,” Kurt said.

“It can be, but fortunately, we were able to find matching ones. And like I said the previous owner had put in new windows, so I was able to match those easily. A lot more is done on the inside of Nick and Jeff’s unit. That’s where you’ll be able to take showers and where you’ll be working this weekend. Next weekend, you’ll be able to do the same stuff again in Kurt and Sam’s unit.”

They nodded.

“Kurt and Sam can help with the decisions on the stain for the trim for their unit. I know it’s popular to paint trim white these days, but with the right trim, it can still have a classic look with stain and stain covers over bumps and light damage so much more easily than white paint. Nothing will have to be updated about the stained trim to sell this place in four years. You can also pick the wall colors, as I said before. I choose the brand and it will be semi-gloss so you can just wipe it down. Again, I know that is not the choice of many interior designers, but they aren’t going to sell their places as a rental for college students in four years. I’m buying unstained cabinets to cut costs and you four are going to stain them.”

“Thank you for giving us the chance to chose things. It will be fun,” Kurt said.

“So for the rest of this afternoon, you’re going to start painting. The drywall is up and ready to go. The bathroom is already done. Let’s go over there and I’ll give you a tour. This unit only has the framing up, no drywall yet. They’ll be back Monday to start on that. This unit will be able to be painted next weekend.”

They followed Jerry to the other door. He opened it and let them in before he closed it.

“So, here we have a small entry area. It’s about 4’ x 5’. The coat closet is here right as you step in. It will have bi-fold doors. I know this space originally had a walk-through to the bedrooms, but I considered how small the closets were in the two bedrooms for two people to share. Each unit will eventually be rented to four students potentially. I realized the place really needed a good coat
closet because there is no way two people can hang their clothes and their coats in the bedroom closet.”

“I like the addition of the closet,” Kurt said. “I like that the bedrooms will be isolated from the front door. It will give them more privacy.”

“So, we have the short wall, which has the furnace and water heater which you can see when we get around to the other side.” He pointed. “The long wall. And the rest of the space is open.” He walked down and stopped facing the dining area. “There’s room for a table and chairs near the patio door.” He walked into what was going to be the kitchen. “This area will have a U-shaped area with the sink here at the back. The stove will be along the wall to my right, your left, which is up against the bathroom wall. This area will have no upper cabinets to maximize the open feeling of this area. The wall behind you that separates the kitchen from the living room will have lower and upper cabinets. The upper cabinets will be the type that go all the way to the ceiling to maximize storage since they will be the only upper cabinets. The refrigerator will sit at the end next to the washer and dryer closet.”

“So, the washer and dryer will be enclosed?” Kurt asked.

“No, with bi-fold doors like the other closets. They will be stacked for floor space efficiency. We haven’t installed any of the doors except the bathroom door yet.”

Kurt nodded.

Jerry stepped out of the kitchen area into the space in front of the bathroom. The bathroom door was directly across the hallway-like space from the laundry closet. “This bathroom has already been tiled with a neutral brown tile and the grout is also brown. All four of you are tall, so I had the area above tub and the ceiling tiled with coordinating tiles as well to keep the drywall and ceiling from getting wet during every shower. I’ll do the same in the other unit.”

Nick peeked in, “It looks good, Dad.”

Jerry said, “Nick designed the bathrooms. Let them see.”

He stepped out and let Kurt and Sam step inside.

“Oh, my God,” Kurt said. “There’s a corner tub and shower combo. No way. It’s amazing.” He looked around. “The idea of a cabinet with the sink basin on top is inspired. We can use the underneath to store towels and I love the built-in mirrored cabinet above the sink. I like that half wall that blocks the toilet from view when the door is open. It’s perfect.”

“Thanks,” Nick said. “I took elements from our two houses that I liked and combined them, taking into consideration the limited space. But I really wanted the corner tubs with the showers. I love mine. You can stain the sink cabinet whatever color you want. This color matches the flooring and stain Jeff and I picked.”

Kurt looked towards Jeff, who waggled his eyebrows and looked toward the tub and nearly caused Kurt to laugh out loud when he realized what it was about the tub that Nick and Jeff liked so much. He refocused and turned his attention back to Jerry.

He turned and pointed down the short hallway. “Now you can see the entry side of the furnace and water heater closet. I had the gas lines removed and I’ve had a high-efficiency geothermal electric heat pump and A/C unit installed. You’ll have separate controls and blowers. And I’ve already installed a heat-on-demand hot water heater in this unit, so you won’t have to take cold showers.”
“Sounds great,” Jeff said.

“The water is also on the same line. Having separated electricity water just causes me to get double minimum bills, which are like $30-35 a month each for the service fee. And I don’t like gas in general. It’s just an added monthly bill and I’d prefer the four of you to live where you can’t end up with carbon monoxide poisoning from the water heater or the stove. You can change clothes in this bathroom and we’ll get started as soon as you’re ready. I’m going to demonstrate the proper technique for using the rollers on the walls and we’re going to get this side of the place painted this weekend.”

The teens nodded.

“Tomorrow morning we’ll go out and you two can pick out the paint, stain, countertops, and flooring color. I’ve already got the brands picked out, but you two can choose the colors while Nick and Jeff continue to paint. They’ve already picked everything. Next weekend all four of you will stain the cabinets. Other than the paint color, trim and cabinet color, the other bathroom will look just like this one with the neutral browns. Unless you were hoping for a gray bathroom, the brown should go with anything else.”

Kurt nodded.

“Get changed, so we can get busy.”

“How are you not dying like the rest of us, Kurt?” Jeff asked as they were all lying in the tent later that evening.

“I change and rotate tires a lot. I work with my hands up above my head as much as I work leaning over. Years of work experience.”

“I’m a wimp,” Jeff said. “I think my arms are noodles now.”

“I have some ibuprofen in my bag if you want some,” Kurt said.

“Please,” Jeff said.

Nick and Sam both said, “Me too.”

Kurt reached for his bag and got the bottle out and handed two to Sam and gave the bottle to Jeff. Once he took some out, he handed it back.

“Thanks,” he said.

“You’re welcome. We’ll bring coffee back in the morning. Your bathroom idea was inspired, Nick. A+ design.”

Jeff laughed.

“Thanks. Jeff and I have discovered many ways to enjoy my corner tub. You’ll notice I picked the ones with the ‘shaving’ seat in them. They’re designed so women have a place to sit while they shave their legs. And it has the seat in the tub basin so it’s more comfortable to sit in to soak. We fit just fine in mine. Knees bent of course, but still so much more comfortable than a regular tub were we cannot fit comfortably at all.”
Sam said, “I’m sure we’ll enjoy figuring out all of the amazing features.”

“Mmm hmm. I’m sure,” Jeff teased.

“How did you convince your dad to put in the fancy tubs?”

“I’m going to live here for four years and I asked. I don’t usually ask for anything, so he gave in pretty quickly.”

“I see. Well we appreciate your effort on our behalf. It was nice and roomy, even if we did shower quickly tonight.”

Sam said, “I like the colors you picked out. I think we’re going to explore more colorful options than we had originally thought about after seeing how nice it looks with the colorful walls. We’re not going to have much in the way of furniture, so we might as well try it out while we’re just starting out. If we hate it, we can always pay for more paint and repaint it next spring.”

After looking through everything the next morning, Kurt and Sam brought paint colors, a stain color along with the sample wood piece, and the countertop sample, and placed them on top of the flooring sample piece to show Jerry.

“What do you think?” Kurt asked.

“That’s a most unusual combination that actually looks really good together. I can’t say that I would have ever considered those together. But it works.” He got the sales associate’s attention and ordered everything. When he was done, he turned back to them. “Let’s go get the paint mixed up. And you’ll need a two large containers of that stain, not that little jar.”

“We’ll go get it and meet you by the paint,” Sam said.

He and Kurt went and got a cart first, and then went to the stain aisle and picked up two the large cans and put the small one back.

“This is a lot of fun,” Sam said.

“We can look to see if they offer some interior design courses. Maybe we could both take it because I think this is fun too.” Kurt put his hand on top of Sam’s and walked right next to him, pushing the cart with him to the paint aisle.

“Oh, good. You brought a cart.” He put the quart of paint for their bathroom in it. “I haven’t seen you two since the wedding. Congratulations. Jeff and Nick said that it was really beautiful.”

“Thanks,” Kurt said. “It was perfect. We just had immediate family and our four best friends.”

“Nick said there were just 15 people total.”

Kurt nodded. “We thought about it a lot and it really meant a lot to us to just have the people there that we knew loved and supported us. It wasn’t a political statement. It was just personal and private.”

“We had a big church wedding because it’s what Lynn’s mom wanted mostly. And it got out of hand. There were people there we didn’t even know. Lynn’s mom invited every living relative I think. Lynn was excited at first about the thought of a big beautiful wedding, but by the time it was
over, I had heard ‘I wish we had eloped’ quite a few times.” He grabbed the other paint as it was mixed and put it in the cart.

Sam said, “We considered that too, but we came to a solution in between the two that came out perfect.”

He reached for another gallon of paint the associate had placed on the counter. “I had mentioned the issue of the yard. I have a suggestion, but you can weigh in. I’m going to rent a power washer and wash the fence. I’ve contact the city and there are no rules about fencing unless the fence is going to extend into the front yard. So, what I’d like to do is move the fence line to halfway up the side of the house on both sides. I’ll get some fencing that matches what is already up and use it to build the new fenced in area. That way each unit will have a small private section of yard that can’t be seen from the front or the backyard. Yours would basically run almost next to the front door. Your living room window would look out onto your private section.”

“That sounds nice,” Kurt said.

“It will be later in the summer because we’ll finish all of the inside work first. I need to get a crew out to extend the concrete patio to accommodate for the second patio door. Right now, your patio door opens out onto dirt. We’ll replant grass last.”

“That makes sense,” Kurt said.

The associate put the final cans of paint on the counter. Kurt and Jerry grabbed them. They pushed the cart to one of the checkout lanes.

“Nick said the two of you really enjoy cooking.”

“We do,” Sam said.

“I’m considering raising the lower cabinets up in your kitchen. Would that be helpful? I saw an article online about a male chef and how leaning over to cut things was such a hassle and how he had his cabinets lifted up to make cooking more comfortable.”

“That would be amazing,” Sam said.

“All right then. I’ll have that done before the framers leave.”

Jerry paid for everything when they got to the register. Kurt pushed the cart out to Jerry’s truck and they loaded everything. They stopped and picked up the promised coffee on the way back.

When they got back Jerry showed them what he had described about the fence. Afterwards, Kurt and Sam went back to helping Nick and Jeff paint, while Jerry did more work on the other unit.

By Monday morning, they had finished painting Nick and Jeff’s unit. They moved on to staining the doors and the trim for the floor and doors. The drywall crew showed up on Monday and the tub was delivered. They did the bathroom first, and then moved to the kitchen and dining room. Around 6:00, the Kurt and Sam packed up the rest of their stuff, showered again, and changed into clean clothes before they headed back to Lima. Nick and Jeff stayed and rode back to Findlay with Jerry.

About two and a half hours later, Kurt pulled into the driveway. “It’s not that far, but it’s a long drive after working all day.”
“It is, but three weekends of us going to work on it probably offsets the cost of that fantastic tub we’re getting.”

Kurt smiled. “The tub is nice. I’m excited to see how our side starts to shape up next weekend.”

“Me too.”

They climbed out and unloaded everything.

Sam said, “I don’t think we’ll need the tent next weekend, just our air mattress. We should be able to sleep inside since the paint will be dry.”

“Maybe. We’ll just have to check. I’m ready to go to bed.” Kurt pressed the garage door button after they had put everything back in the garage. They headed into the house and reset the alarm.

They carried their bag of dirty work clothes into the laundry room and left it to deal with the next evening. They ate what was left of the food, dumped the ice out back, and left the cooler out there to dry out. They took their other bag upstairs. Kurt locked the door behind him, stripped on the way to the bathroom, and got ready for bed. He tossed his clothes into the laundry basket and got into bed. Sam wasn’t far behind.

Kurt rolled over and snuggled up behind him. “It’s not even all the way dark yet. We’re old fogies to go to bed while the sun’s still out.”

“We have to get up in 10 hours. We are more than two hours behind on sleep. It’s fine. We’re not old – just smart enough to get enough rest. Scoot back for a minute.” Sam waited and then rolled over to face Kurt. “I love you.” He kissed Kurt. “I’m excited to look at our wedding pictures tomorrow when we get home from work. I think it would be cool to make one of those small books that we can send the photos in from Sam’s Club. They’re not super expensive. We could print one of the two of us to display with our other photos, but the book would be pretty cool.”

“Let’s look at what we can choose from when we go.” He closed the space between them and kissed Sam. “Can I sleep on you instead of being the big spoon?”

“Of course.” Sam rearranged and moved his arm so Kurt could scoot closer and snuggle up on him.

Kurt kissed him once more before he lay down all the way. “I love you.” He ran his fingers across Sam’s chest. “In a few weeks our place will be ready. We can go over and spend the weekends that Dad’s gone over there and get used to the area. We can go out exploring and learn our way around.”

“‘Our place.’ I like the sound of that.”

“Me too. I hope our crazy paint choices look as interesting as I’m thinking they will.”

“I’m sure they’ll be great. We both like them. We need to go shopping online and look for things and compare prices and stuff. Like we did with college. We can make a chart so we can see everything at once.”

“Let’s take the can of magnetic paint with us next weekend and see if Jerry will let us paint that narrow wall between the two bedroom doors with it. I like our schedules where we can see them and that’s the least likely place for it to be noticeable that we’ve used it.”

“We’ll take photos of what our magnetic spot looks like to show him.”
Kurt snuggled in as close as he could. Sam could sense that his mood had shifted rather quickly. He ran his hand along Kurt’s arm to comfort him and kissed him on the top of his head. He could tell from Kurt’s attempt to control his breathing that he was trying not to cry.

“Can I be the little spoon instead?”

“Of course.”

Kurt flopped over onto his other side and Sam scooted up behind him. Sam slid his arm under Kurt’s pillow and wrapped his other arm under Kurt’s and put his hand over Kurt’s heart and caressed him gently with his thumb. He kissed the back of Kurt’s neck to comfort him.

“I love you,” Sam said quietly with his lips nearly touching Kurt’s neck.

Kurt swallowed willing himself to still speak clearly. “I love you too.” He paused. “He’s gone.”

Now, Sam knew what had happened. “I know. I’m sorry he had to leave.”

“I know he missed his mom and Paris, but now I miss him. It’s hard, but I am glad he came.”

“I’ll miss Dylan too. He and I talked a lot while you and Sebastian were doing your annoying each other and laughing routine all in French.”

“I’m glad you and Dylan hit it off. I hope you didn’t feel like I was excluding you. I didn’t mean to make you feel like that.”

“You didn’t. Dylan’s really interesting, and he and I had a lot of fun talking to each other.” He changed to a British accent. “And my ability to imitate British people improved quite a bit under his tutelage.”

Kurt laughed. “It did. That was really good.”

“You haven’t had anyone to speak French with besides that teacher at Dalton in a long time. Plus, he always made you laugh, so I always liked that.”

“He’s infuriatingly annoying and hysterical. He’s definitely one of a kind and now he’s in Paris. And I have no one to make snide remarks to me in French and make me laugh.”

“I’m sure he’ll be plenty annoying in French when you Skype him. And he’ll still be able to make you laugh.”

“But not in person. I’ll quit whining. I’m glad we’re going to be next door to Nick and Jeff. That will be fun.”

“It will.”

Kurt kept squirming and seemed unable to get comfortable.

“Do you want to shift somehow?”

“I’m just restless and antsy. I think it’s because it’s early and I’m not really sleepy, but I’m tired. My mind won’t turn off.”

“It never turns off,” Sam teased.

“Fine, it won’t slow down enough for me to relax.”
“Well, I do know this way …”

“…This one looks good. It’s leather. It has 20 pages and holds 43 pictures,” Sam said, using Kurt’s laptop sitting at their table.

Kurt was lying on his back on the floor stretching. “I think we actually have that many photos that we liked. Aunt Eunice did a great job.”

“She did. Do you want to try this book’s layout and see if we can arrange the photos we like in a way that fits? It can all be done online.”

“Sure.” He pushed up into a backbend and kicked over to stand up.

“I’m sorry I missed the Cheerio Kurt phase,” Sam teased.

“I had to wear that uniform to school every day.”

“Yeah, but I’m betting it showed of your ASSets quite nicely.”

Kurt walked over and straddled Sam’s lap and sat down. “You can view my ASSets whenever you want to.” He kissed Sam. “We should let Carole look through the photos and pick the ones she wants to print.”

“We can, but let’s just pick one of the two of us and one of the group shots and print them. We can make two copies of the DVD and send the two photos and the DVD to my parents. They can print others if they want to. Carole can do the same thing.”

“That’s true. Good idea.” He kissed Sam again before he stood up. He pulled the other chair right next to Sam and sat down. “Let’s see if we like the layout of the one you were talking about.”

They sat together and worked on the arrangement of the photos in the book for a while until they were pleased with the results.

“So, three 5x7’s of this one of the two of us.” Sam entered the quantity. “One 5x7 of this one. And one 5x7 of this one?”

“Yes. I really like that one where everyone is around us singing. It’s the feeling I remember when I see it. And then three of the group shot with all of us in it.”

“Got it.” He clicked the submit order button.

“Let’s start making the charts you suggested. Beds, dressers, shelves, and we need to start stopping by Goodwill on our way home a few times a week to see what we can get that way. We can collect stuff for the kitchen all summer. Corning sells lids to stuff separately. I’ve ordered them before when my dad accidentally melted some of ours. So, if we find nice sets that are missing a lid or two, we should check their site for the replacement costs because it might be super cheap to finish the set out that way. We do need to make a list of all of the things we need. We can start a separate chart for that and we can add the retail prices in a second column so we know whether what we find is actually a good price for what we want.”

“People gave us most of the expensive things already.”

“They did and it was sweet. The next most expensive part will be to get good pots and pans.”
That’s why we should check frequently. We might be able to assemble a whole set from Goodwill or one of the second-hand shops.”

“Okay, Sam slid the laptop towards Kurt. “You type faster and you’re a much better speller. You can make the lists while I use my phone to start looking up prices.”

Kurt leaned over and kissed him. “We’re a good team.”

They drove to Kent when they got of from work Friday afternoon. Kurt scheduled them to get off two hours earlier than normal so they would have time to actually get some work done after they got there. They had made food the night before so all they had to do was put it in the cooler and stop and buy ice on their way out of town. They grabbed a $5 pizza for dinner on the way out of town.

When they got there, they parked along the street, and headed over to their unit to see the progress.

“Hey, boys,” Jerry greeted them cheerfully.

“Wow, it looks so different with the walls up,” Sam said. “It looks just like the other unit now.”

They walked around and checked the whole place out.

“It looks like we’re ready to paint,” Kurt said.

“Yep. As you can see, the bathroom’s already been painted. They did that before they laid the tiles and tiled the walls. I had the guys stain your cabinet so the sink could be installed. You can make sure you’re pleased with the way the stain looks before you start staining all of the kitchen cabinets.”

They both went in the bathroom.

“I love it. It looks great,” Kurt said.

“I agree. It looks just like what I had imagined it would.”

“Well, good. You can get started anywhere you want on the walls. The crew is over in the other unit right now working on installing Nick and Jeff’s upper cabinets. They’ll be leaving within a half hour. The uppers take a lot more work than the lowers, which they’ll do themselves. They’ve been working on their flooring all day. We’ll get to yours next weekend.”

Kurt asked him about the magnetic paint and showed him what they wanted to do. He approved them using it. They grabbed it out of the Navigator and applied the first coat of it first since they’d need to get several coats on for it to work well. After that, they moved to painting their bedroom, which they decided would be the one on the left that had the closet on the open space of the wall, not behind the door. They had chosen to use the room with more wall space for their office to give Sam more room to set up a painting studio area.

“I wonder who comes up with the names for these colors,” Sam said. “I’m not sure how this nice color of green got the name ‘temptation’.”

“Me either, but it is a nice color. I hope I still think so after we paint the whole room this color.”

Once they had finished the first coat, they moved on to their office.
“This is really white,” Kurt said. “It should make sewing in here when the sun isn’t out easier.”

“I’m hoping it helps with my paintings coming out the color I really want them to. I liked your idea of putting a big mirror in here. We just need to figure out the layout.”

“We can take good measurements before we leave this time, so we can play with one of those online room designer programs and figure it out without moving the furniture a bunch of times.”

They heard the patio door slide open.

“Kurt? Sam?” Jeff called out.

“Down here,” Sam called back.

Nick and Jeff peeked in their bedroom first.

“I like the green,” Nick said.

“This room is bright,” Jeff said.

“We think it will help with my sewing and Sam’s painting. If it’s too bright, we can get a less white white.”

“What did you think of your bathroom?” Nick asked. “We thought it came out really nice.”

“We love it,” Kurt answered.

“It looks awesome.”

“Beach sparkle’ looks great with the brown.”

“We thought so too,” Nick said. “Our floor is finally down. We’ve been working on it all day. They started on it yesterday. We’re getting ready to move the lower cabinets in.”

“We’ll come take a look once we finish this room.”

“Okay.” They took off back to their unit.

It was nearly 11:00 by the time Kurt and Sam made it over to look at the progress on Jeff and Nick’s unit. They opened the patio door and stepped back out and took their shoes off before they went inside just in case there was any paint on them. Nick and Jeff were putting the last of the lower cabinets in place.

“Hey, guys,” Jerry said. “You can come watch and see how it’s done.”

“It looks great in here,” Kurt said.

“Thanks,” Jeff responded. He got down on his knees to push the cabinet into position while Nick and Jerry secured it in place using a power screwdriver.

“How’s it going over on your side?” Jerry asked.

“We got one coat of paint in each bedroom so far,” Sam answered.

“Well, that’s a good start. Once this is in, you can start setting up to sleep. I’m beat and I’m going to hit up a super cheap place I’ve seen on the way in for $29. It took a little longer to get the floor
down than I had anticipated. I’m too beat to drive home tonight. I’ll be back in the morning. I’ll even bring coffee. I’ll just have them toss in some creamers and sugar packets and you can all fix it up yourselves.”

“Thanks,” Kurt said.

“The counter tops are in the living room. We’ll get those on first thing in the morning. The appliances and your cabinets are coming tomorrow afternoon between noon and 3:00. Go bring in whatever you’re bringing in and I’m going to go lock up the other side.”

Nick and Jeff helped them bring in the stuff from the Navigator. By the time they were done, Jerry was back.

“I’m going to leave the key for the door here in case you wake up super early and want to get started on the painting again.” He handed it to Kurt.

“Thanks,” Kurt said, as he slipped it on his keyring.

“Nothing’s outside. Lock the patio door. There’s a gap in the fence from where we’ve been reconfiguring it.”

“Will do,” Jeff said. He walked over and locked it.

“See ya,” Jerry let himself out the front.

Nick locked the door behind him. “This time we can sleep inside. You can sleep in our office.”

“I like the colors,” Sam said. “The deep blue accent wall is nice.”

“We got that idea from you guys,” Jeff said.

“I’m dead tired. I need sleep,” Kurt said. “I worked all day in the shop. A shower and sleep. That’s what I need.”

“Be our guest to go first tonight. We’ll even inflate your air bed for you.”

“You’re such nice hosts,” Kurt said as he grabbed his bag and walked into the bathroom.

Sam followed him. Fifteen minutes later, they were lying in bed, and ten minutes after that, Kurt was sound asleep.

By the time Jerry arrived the next morning, Kurt and Sam had finished the first coat on the accent walls in the living room and the wall that would eventually have the upper cabinets hanging on it. They let him in when he knocked.

“Oh, that’s interesting. I think I like it.”

“Thanks,” Kurt said. “And thanks for the coffee.” He took the drink carrier and sat it on their cooler and put the creamer in two cups. He handed Sam’s to him, and then took a sip. “Liquid energy.”

“Are Nick and Jeff up?”

“They weren’t when we came over here.”
“I’ll go get them up so they can come over and help you after they help me get those countertops attached.” He picked the drink carrier up to take the other two cups of coffee to Nick and Jeff.

About an hour and a half later, they came back over. They started working on the living room while Kurt and Sam were putting the second coat on the office walls.

By noon, all of the cabinets had one coat of stain on them. They took a break and ate lunch.

About 12:30, the delivery truck arrived and Nick and Jeff’s refrigerator, washer and dryer, stove, and dishwasher were delivered. Once they had the appliances in, the delivery guys did the installation on the washer and dryer to get them stacked and balanced properly. Next, all of the cabinets were brought into Kurt and Sam’s unit.

After the delivery guys left, they all watched Jerry tell Jeff what to do to install the dishwasher. Once he was done, Jeff and Nick carefully moved it under the cabinet the rest of the way. They all looked around.

“It’s really shaping up. I’ll get the new light fixtures in this next week. I still need Kurt and Sam to pick theirs out.”

“We’ve chosen. We can show you whenever you want us to. It looks great in here. I like the dark cabinets with the lighter countertops. The blue and gray and brown flecks in the countertops really look good with the pale blue walls.”

“I think so too,” Nick said.

Jeff said, “Now we just need furniture, which will be here on Monday. They don’t deliver on Sundays.”

“Back to painting,” Kurt said.

“I think it’s not dry enough for another coat yet,” Jerry said. “I’m going to show you how to put the flooring in and you four can work on the bedrooms later tonight once it gets too damp outside to stain the cabinets.”

After they had learned what they needed to know, the four of them took the kitchen cabinets outside. Jeff and Nick showed them how to do it and they put the first coat of stain on them.

By the time they ready for a dinner break around 7:00, the cabinets had their first coat of stain and all of the walls had at least one coat of paint on and they could start to see how it was going to look.

“I think ‘orange sparkle’ looks really good so far,” Kurt said. “It’s so hard to tell from the little cards and we picked them in the store and didn’t bring them here and see them inside the place.”

Jeff said, “The names are so weird. Neither one of the paints you chose with ‘sparkle’ in the name has any sparkliness. Misnomer for sure.”

“Which is a good thing because I don’t want sparkly walls,” Kurt said.

Nick said, “We need to go bring the cabinets in. The dew will not be good for them. It’s still sunny out now, so now’s the time to move them inside.”
Once they finally got them all moved inside, they sat in the camp chairs and ate out on the patio.

“Floors,” Nick said.

“Floors,” Kurt agreed.

On Sunday, Jerry got the light fixtures up in Nick and Jeff’s unit and went to pick up the ones that Kurt and Sam had chosen. By dinnertime, the painting was finished with the exception of the small magnetic section, the cabinets had already had the second coat of stain and the first layer of polyurethane put on, and they only had the living room floor left to do.

After they ate around 7:30, they put a tarp down and brought the cabinets into the kitchen area. Jerry left for the evening. The four of them went back to working on the flooring.

Monday morning, Jerry installed the light fixtures in the other unit. The four guys worked put the final coat of polyurethane on the cabinets and stained Kurt and Sam’s trim and doors. They worked through until they got the first coat on everything. They ate lunch and took a tour of both units to see what they light fixtures they had chosen looked like installed. They went back to staining, going in the same order they had that morning. Once they finished the second coat, they carefully carried the pieces in and put them on the tarps for them to finish drying. Kurt and Sam headed back to Lima.

The next weekend they didn’t leave until Saturday morning. Kurt and Sam left driving a small U-Haul with the couch, coffee table, and Burt’s old small desk from the living room in it from their old house. They drove to Ikea and picked up the items they had chosen, and then stopped in a Target that was fairly close to Kent to get the other things they had ordered online and had shipped to the store.

Nick and Jeff helped them unload the U-Haul when they got there, and then followed them to return it. They noticed that Jerry’s crew had hung the upper cabinets and installed the risers in the kitchen during the week. The countertop pieces had been delivered as well. Surprisingly their floors were finished.

When they got back, they put the stain on the sides of the doors they hadn’t stained the weekend before.

“Oh, wow. They patio is done. Yours is new as well?” Kurt asked.

“Not exactly. Dad just had a larger area covered and made it taller, so the original concrete is just under the new, larger section.

“Who finished our floor?” Kurt asked. “We thought we’d have that to do when we got here.”

“We did. We came yesterday with Dad. We knew you had planned to get it done last night, but then you said you couldn’t get off early because someone called in sick yesterday. We knew you would need to wait until this morning to come since you needed to go to Ikea and Target on the way here, since you wouldn’t have had time to get everything getting there at half-hour before Ikea closed. So, we did your floor instead of assemble furniture.”
“It was a big surprise. We appreciate it. It’s looking really good in there. When we take break, I want to see how your place looks. We’ll help you with your furniture if you need it.”

“Thanks,” Jeff said. “We moved all of the pieces to where they’re going, but we still have to assemble everything except the bed. We did get that set up yesterday so we could sleep in it instead of on the air mattress.”

When Jerry got there, Kurt and Sam stopped what they were doing and installed the lower cabinets with him. The appliances were delivered not long after they finished. Once the delivery guys were gone, they installed the dishwasher, which was slightly more difficult because of the riser. They put the countertops on afterwards.

Kurt and Sam went back outside to help finish the doors, but Nick and Jeff had just finished.

“They look great,” Sam said. “Thanks. We got the kitchen set up. Come look.”

Nick and Jeff followed them in.

“It’s almost like the reverse of ours,” Nick said. “You have white cabinets and a dark countertop. The brown countertops look good with the orange accent wall. It’s definitely unusual and I like it.”

“The floor trim is next if you want to help.”

“Sure,” Jeff said.

Jerry left to run some errands. The four guys worked until they got the floor trim installed. They went out back to take a break and plopped down in the camping chairs.

Kurt said, “I just noticed that the fence is done too.”

Sam opened his eyes and looked around. “Nice. Someone’s been hard at work staining and sealing it.”

“That would be us,” Jeff said. “We stayed here after you two left Monday. We worked on the fence Tuesday and Wednesday. We had to get the neighbor’s permission to be in their yards to do the outside.”

Kurt said, “It really does look amazing. We’re going to be totally spoiled living here. It’s so much better than a dorm.”

They all agreed.

“So what’s next on the agenda?” Sam asked.

“Well, you said you were going to restain the wood on the couch, coffee table, and desk you brought. We could take the wood ends off the couch and take the other stuff out to the back of the yard and use the long extension cord to sand them away from the stuff you brought that’s ready to be stained.”

“That would actually really help,” Kurt said. “We bought this really Ivar system stuff at IKEA so that we can configure the shelving like we want it, but it will also be easy to move in the future, but it’s all unfinished. You saw that we brought the base of the table my dad and I used to have in the living room. The top was round and it wasn’t what we wanted, so we bought a new tabletop at IKEA for it. We need to stain and seal that too. Oh, and the headboard we found a Goodwill. It’s
the color we want already, but it needs a fresh coat of stain. Maybe we just all need to start sanding stuff and once it’s ready to be stained we can wipe it down and take it inside to keep it clean until we can start staining. Anyway, let me think about that. The rest of the plan is?”

“We’re just going to clean, assemble furniture, sand, stain, and keep going until everything is done. I’m hoping that will be by Tuesday afternoon. Our parents are all coming Wednesday morning to have our housewarming and a 4th of July cookout.”

“So, sanding,” Kurt said. “Lots of sanding. If we get it all out of the way first, we can sweep the concrete and then hose everything down and start staining stuff. Does any of the stuff you bought need stained?”

“Nope,” Jeff said. “We just picked matching stuff from Ikea. It was easy. Our parents gave us a budget and we just made sure not to go over it. We’re spoiled. We know.”

“You’re not spoiled rotten though,” Kurt said. “You’re hardworking, generous, and kind.”

“Aww, thanks,” Jeff said. He mock punched Kurt in the shoulder. “You’re not so bad yourself.”
“This plate pattern is called Woodland Brown,” Kurt said looking at his phone. “I think it would look pretty good. What do you think?”

Sam nodded. “Yeah. I like it. Do they have everything we need?”

“I don’t know, but we’ve seen it in every Goodwill we’ve gone in today. If this one doesn’t have everything, I’m sure we can stop at one of the other ones on the way back and get more pieces.”

“They don’t have any large bowls like the ones we use at home for our salads.”

“Carole bought those at WalMart. We can buy some there.”

“That works.”

Jeff came up behind them. “We like these blue ones called Old Town Blue. They’re funky and like 70’s-ish. And they have lots of them here.” Jeff started adding plates, bowls, and cups to their cart.

Kurt looked through his printout of the kitchen supplies that he and Sam had come up with. He looked for things they hadn’t found yet while Sam was putting the dishes in the cart. He picked up a couple of things and added them.

Sam said, “We need to stop and get three more large plates, two medium plates, and one more bowl somewhere else.”

“Okay,” Kurt said.

Nick said, “They’ve got everything we need except that we like this style cup better, so we’re just going to get the three they have and look for more. So, we’re ready if you guys are.”

“Yep. We’re good.”

“We’ll just need to stop at Costco for a some stuff. And WalMart really briefly because I have sewing to do still.”

Jeff said, “Got it.”

Kurt opened the door and let Sam walk through. They made several trips out to the Navigator to bring in all of their stuff. Nick and Jeff got all of their stuff out as well. Once they had it all in, Kurt locked the Nav and went inside.

“It looks amazing in here now that the doors are up on the closets and the rooms. When they got those up yesterday, it made a big difference,” Kurt said, as he slipped his shoes off and put them in the closet. He looked at the totally empty space. “I think the closets are the last thing we have left to do before we can actually move our stuff from home here.”

Sam put his in the closet as well. He shut the closet door, turned and grabbed Kurt around the waist, and pulled him close. He kissed him on the back of the neck. “You know what?”
“What?”
“I love you.”
“I love you too. We have our own place.”
“I know. It’s amazing and I love it. Thanks for going out on a limb and going colorful.”
“I actually really like it. I always thought I was a white-and-gray-walls kind of guy.”
“Well, we have one room with white walls.”
“We do. And the rest are cheerful and they remind me of you.” Kurt turned in his arms and kissed him. “Let’s get this stuff from Goodwill into the kitchen and get it all cleaned up and ready to use and get the food put away. Actually, you’re going to do all of that stuff and I’m going to go sew.”
“Works for me. Except I need more kisses.”
Kurt rolled his eyes and laughed. “Always more kisses.” He kissed him more. “A lifetime of kisses.” He kissed him again, and then grabbed some bags and headed to the kitchen.

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“Come look,” Kurt said, as he stepped into the kitchen. “Oh, wow. You got all the stickers off finally. And everything is washed and dried.”
“I’ll come see, and then we need to figure out where we’re going to put everything.” He followed Kurt to their bedroom.
“It’s like invisible.”
“I know. It’s perfect. I wanted it to blend in with the bed and the furniture. I didn’t want it to look feminine like a girly dust ruffle. We can get those storage totes we saw and store our winter clothes under the bed if we ever move somewhere without adequate closet space, like pretty much every New York City apartment I looked at online. This will keep the storage totes from showing and not look prissy. And for now, we can use the space to store the tent, the camping chairs, our sleeping bags, and the cooler.”
“I like it. I like the quilt we found too. I will agree with you that I like Target’s home décor options better. This one is perfect. The one stripe is the exact color of the walls, the dark brown stripe matches the bed frame cover you just made, and the other colors, burgundy, tan, and eggplant all look good together.”
“And your painting looks good. And there’s room for more.”
“Is that a hint?” He wrapped his arms around Kurt.
“Somewhere between a hint and a direct request.”
“I’ll keep it in mind.”
Kurt kissed him. “You do that. Let’s go figure out what to do with the kitchen stuff.”
Sam didn’t let go of him, but let him turn around. They walked to the kitchen with Sam holding Kurt close. When Kurt stopped, Sam propped his chin on Kurt’s shoulder.
“So, what do you think?”

“I’m used to dishes being in an upper cabinet, so I would go for putting them in the far left upper cabinet.”

“Sure.” Sam kissed the side of his neck and let go. He grabbed a stack of plates and put them in the cabinet, and kept at it until all of the dishes were in the cabinet.

Kurt looked around. “It’s weird not having any upper cabinets near the stove, but I saw these drawer spice racks. I think we should get those since there are drawers right next to the stove on both sides. We can put cooking utensils in the other top drawer. And then, maybe towels and dishcloths in the second drawer.”

“That works. I think we need one of those things Carole has under the sink to hold the scrubbers and the cleaners.”

Kurt took his phone out and added it to the list along with the drawer spice holder. “I think we have to watch what we’re doing because he designed this kitchen for four people to share and it has a ton of cabinets whereas a lot of other small places don’t. As much as I want to get all sort of gadgets and stuff I think we should try to stick it out for a month when the bare basics and make a list on the fridge every time we come up with something that we really needed to make something turn out right. I know we’ll need the stuff on the list we made, but we may realize other things too. But the cabinets will come in handy for stocking up on stuff. We can go to Costco every other week and take Nick and Jeff with us.”

Sam nodded. “Paper towel stand?”

“To the left of the sink?”

“Sure.” Sam put it there. “I already put the pots and pans to the left of the stove.”

“Good.”

“Now all the food.”

“Well, we have the cool lazy Susan corner cabinets and five empty lower cabinets and one regular empty upper cabinet and one narrow one.”

“I think we’ll need storage bowls that we don’t have yet and they should go in the upper cabinets,” Sam said.

They stood around for another half-hour debating the merits of where to put what kind of item until they had finally put everything away.

“Dinner?” Kurt pinned Sam to the counter next to the dishwasher.

“Hmm. I think I like the making out in the kitchen more than I want to eat.”

Kurt drew his lower lip in and dragged it across his upper teeth. “A little making out. I still have more sewing to do, while you make dinner.” He leaned forward and kissed Sam.

Kurt made one more pass through. Sam came out of their study to see what he was doing.

“Kurt, relax. It’s a housewarming party, not some TV show with hosts whose job it is to pick apart
“You’re right. You’re right.” He wrapped his arms around Sam. “It looks great. Everything is clean. The piano and the guitar look good over there. I’ll be able to play it once the tuner comes on Friday.”

“It all looks good. All of our upcycling and renewing looks good.”

“You really do like it, right? You don’t wish we had gone more masculine like Nick and Jeff, right? I mean they have an air hockey table that turns into a ping-pong table and a pool table. They have their couch in front of the window and a huge TV with a gaming system where we have our sofa. Their place looks like a man cave minus the mini-bar.”

“Nothing about our place looks girly to me. I like the bright colors. This is me, remember me, Sam?” He teased. “I like colorful.” He kissed Kurt. “And I love you. Stop fretting. You went with the orange because I really like orange. It’s cheerful in here.”

“You’re sure.”

“I’m sure. It’s unique and colorful and it matches us. Let’s shut the curtains in here and on the patio door. It’s nearly dark.” He let go of Kurt and walked to the patio door and double-checked that it was locked.

Kurt checked the front door and closed the curtains. “Better?”

“Definitely.” He held out his hand and put his other behind his back. He bent at the waist just slightly and using his British accent, he asked, “Would you care to join me for a luxurious bath in our most fabulous bathtub?”

“Most certainly.” Kurt wrapped his arm around Sam’s. “Lead on, my good sir.”

Kurt snuggled up behind Sam. He slipped his arm under Sam’s pillow so he could get closer. Sam scooted back until there was no space between them. He slid his right hand up under the edge of his pillow and put his hand in Kurt’s. He pulled Kurt’s other hand up to his lips and kissed his knuckles, and then put Kurt’s hand over his heart and placed his own over the top.

“This bed is comfortable,” Kurt said.

“I think so too. I wasn’t sure without a box spring, but the frame is solid. I like it a lot better than the other ones we looked at. I do have a thing for tossing you into the bed and tickling you. I wouldn’t want the bed to break.”

“Me neither. That’s a lot of fun. We have a lot of fun together.”

“We do.”

“In five days we will have been married a month. It’s gone by so fast with working every day and coming here and working on the weekends. We’ve been together for a year and nearly four months.”

“And now we’re going to start college in about two months. I’m married and I’m going to college on a scholarship. I know you’ve told me plenty of times that you felt like finding me was a dream, but you have to know that I feel the same way. This is my fairy tale ending too. I like our house. I
love you. I love being your husband.”

“You are such a sweet talker. I love you too, sweetie, so much.” He kissed Sam on the back of the neck.” He yawned. “Sorry. I’m really sleepy.”

“Me too.”

Kurt nuzzled into the back of Sam’s neck and they both fell asleep quickly.

Kurt kissed along the Sam’s shoulder.

“Mmm. More.”

Kurt smiled and kissed his neck. “It’s time to get up.”

“S’too early. Cuddles.”

“We are cuddling.”

“Keep cuddling.”

Kurt chuckled. “We’ve been cuddling all night.”

“Mmm. Perfect.”

“If you roll over onto your back, I’ll do what I did on your birthday to wake you up.” Kurt scooted back to give Sam room to move.

Sam rolled onto his back. “You’re very persuasive.”

“Umm hmm. I can be.”

Once Kurt finally got Sam out of bed, they showered quickly and got dressed. They worked as a team to get the fruit salad ready. Once it was ready, they moved on to the chopped salad.

“I think that’s it. We have everything on the list Carole gave me to get with the money she gave me. We’ll get it all out after they’re here.”

“Which shouldn’t be much longer. It’s nearly 11:00.”

“I’m going to open all of the curtains.”

A few minutes later, there was a knock at the door.

They went together to answer it. Kurt looked out the peephole just to be sure and then opened the door and let them all in.

Carole hugged them as she came in. “It’s good to see you.” She stepped in far enough that everyone else could get around her. “It’s beautiful. I admit the idea of converting a 2-car garage made me wonder, but this is like a brand new house.”

“It is.” Kurt shut the door.
“Hey, dude. Long time, no see.” Finn slapped Sam on the back.

“We’ve been working and you’ve been working. How’s the Y?”

“It’s good. I like working there, but I like working at the shop in the evenings too. I’m learning useful things.”

Sam said, “What about you Trish? Still like working there?”

“I do. It’s a lot of fun. So, show us around.”

Kurt stepped back. “You saw the entry way. This is our coat closet.” Kurt pointed. “If you walk towards the piano, you can see the dining room.” He walked around them and into the dining room. “The kitchen, obviously. And past the kitchen on the left is the laundry closet and the doorway to the right is the bathroom. The two bedrooms are off the short hallway at the end.”

Sam said, “You can go look.”

They went through the kitchen and they stopped and looked into each room.

“I’m so jealous of your bathroom,” Trish said. “I need that bathroom.”

“You and me both,” Carole said. “They may need to go on vacation somewhere so I can come housesit for them and soak in that tub.”

Kurt laughed. “Nick designed the bathroom. We love it too.”

“I really like that half wall blocking the toilet from the door in case someone forgets to lock it from the inside,” Trish said.

“This whole set up is really nice,” Burt said. “It’s not big, but the layout makes it feel bigger. I like what you did with all the old furniture. It’s like new, but kind of hip or funky or whatever the right word is these days. You used more than one color of stain on some of it and the stripes on the top are interesting. It suits the two of you.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

Carole said, “I like the colorful walls. Oh, and you did this part magnetic like you did in your room.”

Sam said, “Yeah, we really liked it and Jerry said we could do it.”

They walked back through the kitchen into the dining room.

Burt said, “Our old dinette set looks good with the new top. I like the multiple colors of stain and the stripes.”

“We didn’t want the whole table to be that dark wood like the chairs, but we didn’t want to strip the chairs since they’re in good shape. So, we decided to use the white stain we used on the cabinets and the trim to do most of the top and then the darker stain to put the two stripes down the middle, kind of blending the pieces together.”

“Well, I like it,” Carole said. “And the rectangular top you bought lets you seat more people.”

“We can fit 8 if we put the piano bench on one end and bring in the two chairs from the study.”
Carole stepped back partially into the living room. “Oh, you did the reverse on the end table. You put some white stripes on it and stained the rest of it and the wood on the couch the darker color like the piano.”

“Yeah, the golden oak colored arms didn’t look good and since we already had the tools and the stain, we spruced the up a bit. We did the same thing to Dad’s old desk that was a maple color. And we sanded and refinished the top of the table we share as a desk. Dad’s small desk is my sewing desk now.”

She walked back down to the study and looked in again, more carefully. She came back through and stopped in the kitchen. “Well, I think everything looks great. To be honest, when I looked into your study, I didn’t recognize Burt’s old desk. I had forgotten that you had brought it with you. It’s been, what do they call it, ‘upcycled’ or something like that. You took something that looked dated and no longer in style and made it look really cool. You guys have been busy.”

“We have,” Sam said. “The closets are our last project. We can’t bring our clothes over until we get those done.”

Burt said, “Well school doesn’t start for a couple of months. You’ve got time.”

“We’re going to come and stay a few weekends. We’ve spent so much time working on the house that we’ve not explored the town at all. We want to get comfortable here before classes start.”

“Makes sense,” Burt said.

“We can’t move in until the middle of the week before classes start, but we don’t have to know where the grocery stores and stuff like that are since we’ll be living in a dorm,” Trish said.

Finn said, “I love the whole idea of a meal plan pass. All the food I can eat with no need to cook it myself.”


Finn looked at him strangely.

“The propensity for people to eat too much when presented with an all-you-care-to-eat option for every meal, and then gain 15 pounds their first year in college.”


“I hope so,” she teased.

There was a knock at the patio door. Kurt looked out and saw Nick. He motioned for him to come in.

“Our parents are here too now. Can they come over for a tour? Obviously my dad’s seen everything, but the other three want to see.”

“Sure. Bring them over, and then we’ll switch. And we can start to get everything going once the grill is set up.”

“Oh, yeah. That’s their housewarming gift. The grill they brought is a new one for us to keep.”

“That’s really nice of them,” Kurt said. “Go ahead and get them.”

Jerry stayed out on the back patio started assemble the new grill. Everyone else came in a few
“It’s like they’re two different houses completely. I really like both.”

Natalie said, “Can we go down to the bedrooms?”

“Sure,” Kurt answered. “Feel free to look around.”

Natalie, Howard, and Lynn went down together. Kurt and Sam followed them.

“I like the colors you’ve used throughout,” Natalie said. “They all coordinate.”

Lynn agreed, “They do and it’s very cheerful.”

“Thanks,” Kurt said.

Lynn asked, “What’s this floor called? I’ve never seen Jerry put down a pale colored floor before. I really like how airy it makes everything feel.”

“It’s called Brentwood Pine. We liked the light mixed with the darker. We thought it looked good with the darker brown tile in the bathroom, but went well with the white stain on everything.”

Natalie commented, “I’ve never seen him use white stain before either. White painted trim yes, but I really do like the white stain. It’s unique.”

“Thanks,” Sam said.

Lynn said, “You four are welcome to follow us back and look at Nick and Jeff’s place.”

Burt, Carole, Finn, and Trish followed them out through the patio door and in through the other patio door.

Kurt stepped closer to Sam and wrapped his arms around him. “Let’s start getting the chips and stuff out.” He kissed him gently.

“Mmm. How about we kiss more first?”

Kurt kissed him once more. “More later, unless you want an audience.”

“They’ve seen us kiss before.”

“Chips.”

“Fine, but one more.” He kissed Kurt, and then started to put the chips out.

“A TV?” Kurt asked.
“You don’t have one and I thought you might like to watch some of those shows you like on something a little bigger than your laptop. I didn’t bring it in earlier because I didn’t see anywhere for you to put it.”

“We can figure that out later. There’s nothing in any of the closets since they have no shelving in them yet. We can put it in the coat closet it to get it out of the heat.” Kurt reached in and pulled the box out. “Thank you.”

Burt shut the trunk and followed them inside. Sam opened the door and the closet door and Kurt put the TV inside.

“It’s nothing huge like the one Nick and Jeff have over there.”

“It’s perfect, Dad. It says it’s 32”. That’s much bigger than my laptop screen. Plus, we can get a TV stand with wheels, or put wheels on one, so we can move it closer to the couch when we’re watching it, if we want to.”

“That’s true. We didn’t buy a DVD player because I didn’t know if you needed one. I know Finn’s game system thing plays DVDs. I didn’t know if the one I got you does.”

“It doesn’t, but that’s okay. We can get one. They’re not that expensive – much less than a TV.” Sam said, “Thank you. It’s really nice.”

“It’s one of those smart TVs,” Burt said. “The guy said you can watch Amazon and Netflix right from the menu on the TV.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

“You’re welcome. I knew this was coming, but it seems so quick. You graduated and now a month later, you’ve got your own place. It looks great. I better get back outside and get those burgers on the grill. I’m sure they’ve finished their tour over there.”

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Kurt and Sam followed him outside. Everyone except Burt and Howard and the two of them were sitting on new benches.

“The benches are cool,” Sam said.

Jeff said, “They’re even cooler than you think. Watch.” He and Nick stood up and flipped the back forward and it transformed the bench into a half picnic table.

“That is VERY cool,” Sam said.

“My mom and Lynn stained and stained and sealed the boards and assembled them for us after my dad cut all the pieces the right size. Now we have seating and picnic tables both.”

“Thank you,” Kurt said.

Sam said, “Thanks. I’m sure we’ll use them a lot.”

Howard said, “There’s something else in the back of my truck that needs brought back here if some of you would go get it.”

Kurt and Sam followed Nick and Jeff through their place and out the front door.
“The new sidewalks look really good,” Kurt said. The front will look better one the grass grows back in where the old sidewalk used to be and on our side where your dad had the gravel removed from the area that used to be the driveway.”

Nick made it to the truck first. “It’s one of those mini sheds and a lawnmower.”

“Nice,” Jeff said. “Let me run back through the house and open the gate again.”

A couple of minutes later, the other three had the shed box waiting to go in through the gate. Jeff and Nick went back for the mower. Jeff relocked the gate from the inside. They took both boxes into the back yard.

“Thanks, Dad,” Jeff said.

“You’re welcome,” Howard said. “You four can get the lawn mower shed together and put the lawn mower handle on. The other stuff is still in Jerry’s truck.”

Nick went back outside to look in the bed of his dad’s truck. He brought a new gas container and a weed eater in through the house.

“These things?” he asked when he came out through the patio door.

“That’s them,” Jerry said. “Now the four of you can work out who does the yard work instead of me paying someone to do it.”

“Thanks, I think,” Nick teased. “Now we know what the extra concrete slab on the other side of the heating and A/C unit is for.”

“You got it. Go ahead and put it together while we grill everything,” Howard said.

Once the burgers were done, the moms rearranged the four benches and flipped the backs forwards and created two picnic tables. Kurt and Sam took the salad, the fruit salad, and the chips over to Nick and Jeff’s and sat them out with the dishes that had been brought. Everyone went through buffet style and took their plates outside to eat.

“Is there dessert?” Finn asked, after he finished a second plate of food.

“We made an ice cream cake,” Sam said.

“Awesome.”

“I brought lemon squares,” Lynn said.

“Ooh, I love those,” Trish said.

“Me too,” Nick said.

Natalie said, “I brought vanilla cherry poke cake with whipped cream frosting.”

Finn said, “I like all of those things. What kind of ice cream cake?”

“Mint chocolate chip with chocolate cake.”

“That’s my favorite.”
“I know, Finn. That’s why I chose that combination.”

Finn had a big grin on his face. “You’re awesome.”

“Thanks.”

Lynn said, “If everyone’s done for now, I’m going to go in and put the refrigerated stuff away.”

No one asked her not to, so she went ahead inside.

Carole stood up and said, “Same thing for this meat. Anyone want another burger or hot dog right now?” She got several “No thank you” responses, so she took them inside as well.

When she got inside, Lynn said, “You know, we should put half of this stuff in Kurt and Sam’s refrigerator.”

“I’m sure they’d appreciate it. I’ll go bring some bowls over.” She went out and came back a few minutes later.

She and Lynn divided the side dishes up and Carole took the bowls of food and put them in Kurt and Sam’s refrigerator.

“We can’t thank you all enough for doing all of this for Kurt and Sam. They’re going to be so much happier here than in a dorm. Kurt had a single with a private bath at Dalton and there was no guarantee that he and Sam would get one of those rooms with its own bathroom in the dorm here. From what I could see, there was just one of those types of rooms on each floor in the two buildings that have them. And with them being freshmen, it didn’t seem likely, but I was hoping they would.”

“Nick and Jeff have been in a double suite at Dalton the last three years, so they had to share the bathroom with whoever was placed in the other room, but it was still just four guys. And Dalton had a really strict No Bullying policy that the university can’t possibly enforce the way Dalton did. We’re still in the appeals process of getting the university to agree to them living off campus.”

“I hope you win the appeal.”

“We do too. We have the money to pay for the dorm, but they will be so much happier here. They’ve already had the dorm experience for the last three years.”

“They’ve been together a long time.”

“They’ve been together their whole lives. Natalie and I have been best friends since we were little kids. We grew up went to the same college and were roommates. We met guys we liked who were already friends. Nick and Jeff have been best friends since before they could walk.”

Kurt opened the patio door and came in carrying the ice cream cake. “Finn wants dessert.”

“When doesn’t Finn want dessert?” Carole teased.

Kurt put the cake out on the counter. “I think he and Trish and Jeff and Nick are going to play one of those kill each other video games. *Call of Duty* maybe?”

“Got it,” Lynn said. She turned and went to get the poke cake out and sat it on the counter next to the ice cream cake. She took the lid off the lemon squares too. “You can tell them that dessert is ready.”
Kurt nodded and went back outside. Less than a minute later, Finn came in with the others following along behind him. They grabbed dessert and set up in the living room. Nick started the game.

Carole looked outside. Kurt and Sam were picking up the rest of the food. She opened the door and let them in. Natalie came in carrying a stack of plates and loaded them into the dishwasher. They brought in the tall glass mugs and sat them on the counter.

Carole said, “Those tags were a great idea, Kurt.”

“Thanks. I saw those silicone wine glass markers and I thought how it would work on cups and then I saw those glasses with handles. So, we both bought two sets and now we won’t be always wondering whose glass is whose. Guests just have to remember white color tag they put on their glass.” He went back outside and helped Sam collect up the silverware and took it inside and put it in the dishwasher. “We can pull our stuff out after it’s clean.”

When they went back outside, the three dads had turned the picnic tables back into benches and moved them back to their original spots. Kurt and Sam went back to finishing the assembly on the mower shed and put the mower, the weed eater, and the gasoline can inside it and closed the lid. Kurt took the grill grate into their kitchen and cleaned it and brought it back out. Sam had moved the grill up against the back of the house.

“I think we need to get a grill cover for it. I’ll go get my measuring tape so we can get the right size. They should have them at Lowe’s when we go to get the stuff for the closets in a little bit.” He put the measurements in his phone and the tape measure in his pocket when he finished.

Jerry came back out after he finished his dessert. “You two ready to go get the closet stuff?”

“Yeah. I have the designs and all of the measurements for both units. I just need to grab my drawings.”

“Alright,” Jerry said. “We’ve got all the stuff for the closets. Jeff said you knew which curtains rods and stuff they needed.”

“I do. I have their curtains done, so if get the rods get installed when we get back everyone can see the completely finished version of their place. I’ll go grab them and come back. Why don’t you two go ahead and get in line?” A few minutes later, Kurt was back with four curtain rods and several packs of curtain clips.

“Is that it?” Jerry took them from Kurt.

“Yep.” I’ll be right back. He got in line when he came back. By the time he got through the line, Jerry and Sam had loaded Nick and Jeff’s closet pieces. Kurt helped Sam load theirs.

“What did you get?” Sam asked.

“The drawer spice rack and that organizer thing for under the kitchen sink. We can look for the other stuff, but I’d like to start collecting our own spices each week we go shopping. Oh, and a bag of clothespins. I figured they’re multi-purpose and we need to be able to close those chip bags.”

“Good idea. We found those cutlery trays cheap. I doubt very few people donate spice drawer racks because they’re a specialty that people buy for themselves.”
Jerry opened the front when he came back from returning the cart. “Anything else?”

“Just a grill cover. They were out of the size we need. Other than that, I just need to touch up the curtains by ironing them. Maybe you and Howard can get the curtain rods up while Sam helps me with the ironing.”

“We can do that. I’m interested in seeing what these surprise curtains look like.”

“Nick wouldn’t tell you?”

“Nope.”

About an hour after they got back, Nick and Jeff sent everyone out to the back yard to wait. Kurt and Sam brought the curtains through the front door and the four of them hung them all up. Once they were finished, they pushed the patio curtains back and let everyone come back inside.

Lynn was the first to say anything. “Who picked this fabric? I love it.”

“We went out together,” Kurt said. “I showed them about five different fabrics that I thought would look good with the overall feel of what they were doing. We took the color card from the two colors of blue paint with us.”

Carole said, “It’s got a really retro, but modern vibe.”

“It’s a mid-century inspired print. The blues matched so well, and the large geometric pattern just fit with their style.”

“It’s kind of like what you have in the living room and dining room at your place.”

“Kind of. Ours are actually from the late 60’s. We found them in a second-hand place between here and Lima. They have all of the paint colors we used. It’s a kind of funky leaf pattern. I made the ones in our other two rooms out of some other old curtains we found. I shortened them and lined the backs with white fabric from sheets since they were a little more see-through than we wanted in the rooms that face the street. Since Nick and Jeff went with the same light blue walls through the whole place, they just had me make all of the curtains out of the same fabric.”

They walked down to the other rooms. “It looks good, though,” Natalie said. “They went with a solid dark navy comforter. And the other room is just their study area with their desks and some shelving, so there’s nothing in there to match anything to.”

Jeff came bounding up behind them. “We like them. Kurt’s awesome. And so is Sam.”

“What did I do?”

“You helped us put furniture together while Kurt sewed.”

“That’s true.”

“And we’re thinking that maybe you can help us come up with what to put on those three big empty walls in the living room and dining room.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“I’m going back to shoot more people.” He ran off as quickly as he had appeared.
“If I could just bottle his energy, I’d never have to work another day in my life,” Natalie joked.

“I’m sure you’d make a fortune,” Kurt agreed.

They all turned back and went back into the kitchen.

“Is there any dessert left?” Kurt asked. “I was too full to eat any before we went out.”

“The lemon bars are in that container,” Lynn pointed to the counter. “The poke cake is in the refrigerator. I think most of the ice cream cake is gone.”

“That would be Finn’s doing. He eats like half the cake himself every time I make it.”

Trish came around the corner. “What can I get for you, my dear?” Kurt asked her.

“I just came to find my glass and get some water.”

“By all means,” Kurt motioned with both hands toward the sink.

“I like the curtains,” she said. “You’re going to help me decorate my first place, right?”

“Sure.”

“It won’t be next year. We have to live on campus for two years.”

“Well, whenever it is, count me in.”

“Trish! You’re up,” Finn called from the other room.

She hurried back into the living room.

Kurt turned back to the fridge and pulled the poke cake out, cut himself a slice, put it on a napkin, and put the cake back in the fridge. He took a lemon bar from the container, put it on the napkin with his cake, and put the lid back on the container. He went in the living room, but didn’t see Sam. He opened the patio door and went in their place and called out, “Sam?”

“In the bathroom,” Sam answered.

Kurt sat down at the table and waited for Sam to come out. “I brought you a lemon bar.”

Sam leaned over and Kurt looked up. Sam kissed him, and then took the lemon bar off the napkin and took a bite. Kurt opted to just pick his slice of cake up and eat it rather than get up to get a fork.

“I think these things are made out of half sugar, but they’re so good. Please never make them for me because I have zero willpower.”

Kurt stood up to wash his hands and toss out the napkin. He kissed Sam as he walked past. “I’ll keep that in mind.” He washed and dried his hands. He turned around to be met with Sam kissing him and pinning him to the counter. Kurt wrapped his arms around Sam.

“You know what?”

Kurt looked him in the eyes. “What, sweetie?”

“I’m so in love with you.” He moved his hands up to the sides of Kurt’s neck and ran his thumbs
along Kurt’s jaw. He leaned in and kissed Kurt, slow and full of passion.

They spent the rest of the afternoon talking, playing games, and horsing around outside. Around 5:00, all of the guests began to gather up their stuff to leave. Finn had another slice of ice cream cake. Trish grabbed another lemon bar. Kurt gave Finn the bag of Doritos to take with them to snack on.

“You guys did good,” Burt said. “We’ll see you Friday.”

Kurt said, “I’m not sure exactly what time. It depends on how long it takes to tune the piano. He’s coming at 2:00.”

“Just call when you’re an hour out and I’ll know when to have dinner ready,” Carole said.

Sam nodded. “We’ll do that. Thanks for coming over.”

“We had a good time,” Carole said. She hugged both of them.

Kurt and Sam waved to Nick and Jeff’s parents as they all left. They followed Nick and Jeff back into their place and collected their plates and cutlery from their dishwasher.

Kurt said, “7:00?”

“Yep,” Nick said.

“We’ll see you then,” Kurt said. “I want to go take a shower and clean up. The slip-n-slides are fun, but I need a shower.”

“See ya,” Jeff said. “I think I’ll persuade Nick that he needs a shower too.” He winked at Kurt as he shut the patio door.

Sam had already put the plates in the cabinet when Kurt came in. He waited for Kurt to come around the counter to put the cutlery in the drawer and wrapped his arms around Kurt from behind. He kissed up the back of his neck. “I’m hoping that you’re planning for a shower for two.”

“Definitely. I was thinking of two showers. One very brief one so that we could get in bed and a second one later.”

He continued to work his way up and had reached Kurt’s ear. “I think that’s a great idea.”

“Let me go and I’ll close the patio curtains.”

“M’kay.”

Kurt turned back from closing them and Sam was standing outside the bathroom with nothing on. He saw the washer door standing open and smiled. He slipped his swim trunks and the tank he was wearing off and tossed them in and shut the door. He followed Sam into the bathroom.

“I really love our new bathroom.”

“Me too. And the shower curtain you made is perfect,” he said as he pulled it back to turn the water on. “Come on, gorgeous. I can’t wait to get my hands all over you.”
“The feeling is mutual.”

They left at 7:00 and rode in Nick’s car to Cleveland to watch the fireworks over Lake Erie. They stopped and got pizzas after they got there. They took camping chairs and a sleeping bag because they weren’t sure what they would need. Once they got to where they were going, they opted for the sleeping bags. The found a spot, opened them out, sat down and ate the pizzas while they waited for it to get completely dark. Once they finished eating, they played Uno until it got too dark to see the cards.

Sam sat loosely criss-cross, leaving enough space for Kurt to sit in the center. Kurt pulled his legs up and made a bridge over Sam’s crossed legs. Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt, who wrapped his arms around his knees. Sam placed gentle kisses on the back of Kurt’s neck.

“Having fun so far?” Sam asked.

Kurt turned back and leaned to the side and kissed Sam. “I always have fun when we’re together.”

Sam managed to slip his hand up under the edge of Kurt’s t-shirt and caressed him with his thumb. “Me too.”

Once the fireworks started, they repositioned themselves to be able to see them better out on their backs. Sam extended his arm and Kurt scooted closer. Kurt pushed up on his elbow and leaned over and kissed Sam.

“I love you. I always thought kissing under fireworks would be romantic and I was right.”

“It is romantic, and I love you too.”

Kurt looked over at Nick and Jeff and they had done the same thing. They were lying on their sleeping bag on their backs snuggled up. Kurt lay back down and they watched the rest of the show together.

By the time they got back to the car and waited for the traffic to ease up a bit before they left, they didn’t end up leaving Cleveland until nearly 11:00. They got back home after midnight. Kurt shook the sleeping bag out once again on their way in and stuffed it in the washer as he walked past. He turned it on and followed Sam to the bedroom.

“That was really cool,” Kurt said. “I’d never been to a fireworks display in a big city before.”

“It was nice. I know we’ve had several showers today already, but I know you’re not going to want to get in bed as sweaty as we are. Let’s go.”

Kurt kissed him. “You know me so well. Quick shower, then snuggles.”

Sam kissed him on cheek. “Just a quick shower. I know. We need to go to sleep.”

Ten minutes later, they were in bed snuggled up.

“This casserole is really good, Carole,” Kurt said.

“I’m glad you like it. I got the recipe out of a magazine. You can copy it if you want to.”
“I will.”

Burt asked, “So, did you guys get everything done you wanted to?”

Sam nodded. “Yeah, we spent all day yesterday doing the closets in both units. We did theirs first since they went back to Findlay this morning. We got ours done this morning.”

“I think they look really good. The piano sounds good again. And Jerry’s having the cable and internet turned on the beginning of August. We’re going to pack up our room over the next week and start to take stuff with us when we go over there. When you come visit us the next time, it will look more lived in.”

“Well, I thought it looked nice already,” Carole said. “But having your stuff there will make it feel more homey.”

Finn said, “Nick and Jeff have a sweet system set up in their living room.”

“That they do,” Kurt said.

Trish asked, “Besides those paintings we all did that you’re making into a big collage, what else are you going to hang on the walls?”

“We haven’t really decided yet,” Sam said. “I’m thinking of waiting for a really good Michael’s coupon and buying a long canvas or maybe doing a set of three coordinating paintings to hang over the sofa. But we haven’t taken the rest of my paintings yet, so there might be some of those we’ll hang.”

Kurt asked, “Did you four have a good time at Aunt Eunice’s yesterday?”

“We did,” Carole said. “We had a nice dinner Wednesday evening after we got there.”

“Trish and I rode the four wheelers and went out riding. It was fun.”

They continued to talk until everyone had finished eating. Finn and Trish went downstairs and brought games up and set them up in the dining room while Kurt and Sam cleared the table.

“It’s feels weird to be here after being there for so many days in a row,” Kurt said. He snuggled back into Sam.

“It does.”

“Will you sing me the song you sang for me at our wedding?”

“Sure.” Sam began to sing.

Kurt spent Saturday at the shop working with Burt, which was something he didn’t get to do that often anymore since Burt was gone to DC most weekdays.

Sam stayed at the house and worked on packing the stuff from the shelves in their room. He went downstairs to grab some newspaper to wrap all of the picture frames.

“Hey, Sam. Can you come in here, honey?”
“Sure.” He turned towards the kitchen instead of the garage. “Yeah?”

“I went through the cabinets yesterday while Burt was at work. I pulled out all of the stuff that wasn’t mine or weren’t wedding gifts. I put it all in a couple of boxes in the laundry room. I know some of the stuff was Kurt’s mom’s. I want him to have that stuff. I know he took a few things with him when you went last week because he knew he’d need them to make the cake that Finn wanted.”

“We only took some measuring cups, measuring spoons, a set of three mixing bowls, and the jelly roll pan. You’ll have to ask Kurt if we took things that had been his mom’s. I don’t know.”

“Okay. Anyway, you and Kurt can look through the boxes when he gets back from the shop. You can actually pack what you want neatly then.”

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome, honey. Do you two like it there?”

“We do. It was strange the first couple of days, but the house is really nice. I guess we’ll see about the neighbors once more of the students move in next month. Hopefully none of them are super noisy.”

“I hope not, but I still think it will be quieter than a dorm because even if they do throw parties, it would most likely be on the weekends and in a dorm, there are always people milling around and opening and closing doors and stuff.”

“That’s true.”

“I won’t keep you from whatever you were doing. I just wanted you to know to go through those boxes.”

“Thanks. I just came down to get some newspaper to wrap our picture frames in. If you need me, I’ll be upstairs packing stuff.” He grabbed the newspaper from the garage and went back upstairs.

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Kurt opened the boxes in the laundry room and looked inside. “Let’s just take them upstairs and sort through them.” He picked up each box. “This one is the lightest.” He handed it to Sam. He picked the other one up and followed Sam upstairs. “Wow, you’ve made a lot of progress.”

“Thanks.” Sam sat the box down on the floor at the end of the bed.

Kurt sat his down next to Sam’s. “We’ll just rewash everything after we get there. Let’s just empty everything out onto the floor and wrap up the breakable stuff and put it back in the boxes neatly.”

“Works for me.” He leaned over and kissed Kurt. “I missed you.”

“I missed you too. It was weird without you there, but I wanted to spend one day working with Dad. Who knows if I’ll get another chance any time soon.”

Sam turned around and picked up some of the newspaper he had been using earlier. They started wrapping stuff and about ten minutes later, they had everything back in the boxes.

“Now what?” Sam asked.
“Now I wash my hands to get the newspaper ink off.” He hopped up and went in the bathroom.

Sam washed his hands next.

“It’s weird without my vanity over here. And with our table gone.”

“I know, but I had some place to stack the boxes out of the way with the table gone.”

“I’m going to jump in the shower because the next thing I’m going to do is go through my clothes and I don’t want to try them on all sweaty.”

“You want company?”

“Sure.”

Sam opened the door and sat the still-flat boxes in front of the dresser. He didn’t see Kurt. He went towards the bathroom and saw him sitting on the floor of the alcove leaning against the wall. He rushed over to him and knelt. “Hey, what’s wrong? Did you get hurt somehow?”

Kurt shook his head. “No, I didn’t mean to scare you. It’s just I opened the cabinet and there just so much stuff in there. I feel stupid now when I look at some of it. There are things in there I only wore once and I saved up for like a week to buy.”

“You’re mad at yourself.”

“Yeah.”

“You don’t do that anymore, you know? So, you’ve obviously learned something since you bought some of this stuff.”

“I need to list some of it on eBay. We can do that this week in the evenings, I guess. We can take pictures today if I get my rear in gear. Otherwise, we’ll still have some left to take pictures of tomorrow. Either that or I need to just cut my losses and take it to a resale shop in Columbus.”

“How long does the eBay process take?”

“Umm. Probably 20 minutes per item, plus then after it sells, it has to be packaged up properly and taken to the post office.”

“Why so long?”

“It could be even longer sometimes. I have to get photos from different angles and close-ups. People want to see good photos of items that are expensive. And all of the photos have to be uploaded to eBay and I have to write a thorough description of each item. Let’s just go through them. Once I see what I don’t need, maybe I’ll have a better feel for which way to go.”

“I thought we did this last year.”

“I mostly did my closet. I was going to do a more thorough job, but I just never did. Like I said, it’s kind of depressing.”

Sam switched to his best British accent, “I will endeavor to entertain you, my good sir.” He kissed Kurt and got up. “Just tell me how I can be of assistance.”
Sunday morning, Kurt slipped downstairs and made breakfast and took it back upstairs. He accidentally knocked over the stack of flattened boxes in front of the dresser and made Sam jump.

“I’m sorry, sweetie. I brought you breakfast. I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“S’okay. C’mere.” He sat up and patted the bed.

Kurt sat down carefully.

“Thank you. Looks great.” He stretched and rubbed his eyes. He picked up the plate with his food on it and started to eat. “So, what’s the plan?”

“Well, we’re going to go out to lunch and then because it’s about a million degrees outside, we’re going to the bowling alley to bowl and play pool. “And I’m sorry to cancel half of today snuggles.”

“I get it. Your dad isn’t here that often and we’re moving soon and Trish and Finn are going to be moving to Toledo.”

“But for now, we’re going to finish eating, and then I’m turning our book on or some music on and we’re going to snuggle.”

“Could I interest you in some Spanish guitar music and some sexy snuggles?”

Kurt waggled his eyebrows. When the finished eating, he put the tray on the dresser, and loaded the Spanish guitar music CD.

“And another strike for Burt,” Trish said. “We’re never, ever going to beat him.”

“Speak for yourself,” Kurt said. “I have beaten him before. It can be done.”

“Let’s see it then,” she challenged.

“Ooh,” Finn said. “Now, you’ve done it.”

Kurt focused and approached. The ball whizzed down the lane with just the right spin and velocity to send all ten pins flying.

“Show off,” Trish said. She got up and took her turn. She knocked down three pins, and then three more pins. “Six! At this rate, I’m not even going to break a hundred.” She plopped down next to Finn.

“Well, it’s not like I’m going to be any good at this. Maybe I’m too tall.”

She laughed. “Good one, Finn. But you can change the light bulbs without a step stool.”

“This is true. That’s much more practical ability anyway.”

A few frames later, and the winner was Kurt by three points. They turned their shoes in and paid for three pool tables. Burt played Kurt. Finn and Sam played against each other. Trish faced Carole.
Sam waited until a point in the game when Finn really needed to concentrate, and right as he pulled back to take the shot, Sam quietly said, “Remember last year on the drive to Aunt Eunice’s when you asked us some questions? I can tell you what’s in it for the-.”

Finn’s aim slipped and he missed. “Shh… Not in here.”

Sam burst out laughing.

Finn play punched Sam in the arm. “You did that on purpose.”

Sam was still laughing. “And you’re blushing. My turn.”

Kurt turned to look at them. Sam caught his eye and winked at him before he took his shot.

“Yes!” Sam exclaimed.

“Cheater,” Finn declared.

Burt looked up. “Sam’s cheating? How? He bumping your arm when you take a shot?”

“No. Never mind.”

Sam started laughing again.

Burt rolled his eyes and turned back.

In the end, Burt beat Kurt, Sam beat Finn and Carole beat Trish. They stood in line to return their cues.

“Who knew that Carole was a pool shark?”

They all four looked guilty.

“Really? All of you?”

Finn laughed and leaned forward and kissed her on the side of her neck. “At least she doesn’t cheat.”

Sam laughed.

“How was he cheating?” Burt asked.

“Saying things to distract me.”

Burt laughed. “You just have to ignore people antagonizing you and focus anyway.”

“Yeah. I’ll work on that.” He stuck his tongue out at Sam when Burt wasn’t looking.

Carole saw him though and she started laughing. “You two.” She rolled her eyes.

Burt took all of their cue sticks. “Why don’t you all go decide where to get ice cream?”

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After they had said their goodbyes, Kurt and Sam went back up to their room. Kurt took his shoes off and plopped onto his side of the bed and faced the center of the bed. Sam mirrored him.
Kurt said, “What did you say to Finn to get him so flustered?”

“Remember last summer when he was asking about gay sex?”

“Yeah.”

“I offered to answer his question about what was in it for the bottom.”

“You did not.”

“I did, well I phrased it carefully and didn’t actually say the word ‘bottom’, but he knew what I was ABOUT to say and he shushed me up and then totally flubbed his shot.”

Kurt started laughing. “That was fantastic and devious.” He kissed Sam. “Although, I’m not sure that I should be encouraging you to pick up my bad habits.”

This time Sam laughed. “Teasing your stepbrother isn’t a bad habit. I think that means you’ve finally achieved the ‘family’ level of annoyance skills. And I have too now. Things are so different than they were a year ago, in a good way. Trish has been really good for him too. Someone who likes him for something other than his high school social standing.”

“I agree. New topic.”

“Yes.” Sam said it with the finality of answering a yes/no question.

“You don’t even know the new topic or if it was a question.”

“I imagined the topic to be kissing. And whether I wanted to kiss you.”

Kurt laughed and kissed him. And then, he started to tickle him.

“So, the topic was whether you should tickle me? Maybe I’ve changed my answer.”

Kurt stopped and kissed him again. He rolled him onto his back and pinned him to the bed. “Neither kissing nor tickling was my new topic.”

“Well, that’s a shame.” He didn’t quite manage to keep a straight face.

“Samuel Robert Hummel-Evans.”

Sam broke out laughing. “Yes?”

“Are you frustrating me just to hear me call you by your full name?”

“Who me?” While Kurt was distracted, Sam took the advantage and flipped them. He started kissing down Kurt’s neck while unbuttoning his shirt, and then continued to kiss down his shirt as he undid each button. “You’re gorgeous. So soft and kissable.”

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A while later, Kurt was curled up behind Sam holding him close, snuggling with their legs and arms intertwined.

“What did you actually want to talk about earlier? Before I hijacked the conversation and-”

“-And made me feel incredibly desired and loved?” He kissed Sam’s shoulder.
“Mmm hmm.”

“Our trip to Tennessee.”

“What about it?”

“Well two completely different topics. One is your family and two is I came up with in idea of what you could paint to hang over the sofa.”

“Okay, let’s talk about the painting first.”

“I was thinking that we could take a series of photos of the sunset with the Smoky Mountains in the foreground. You could use colors of brown and orange that would go with the colors in the living room and it wouldn’t be seasonal like painting trees with fall foliage, which was my first idea that wasn’t something abstract.”

“I could do that. Any particular style?”

“I was thinking maybe either pointillism or impressionism.”

“Okay. I’ll work on some smaller practice pieces to see how best to go about it.”

Kurt kissed his shoulder. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

“The other idea I had is you know how those really old books had the illuminated capital letters at the beginning of each chapter?”

“Mmm hmm.”

“Well, I was looking online and there are some really cool ones. I was wondering what you would think of us working on four 11x14 canvas boards and illuminating the letters L-O-V-E to hang over the piano. After seeing everything, I think I want to hang the collage we’re going to make out of everyone’s paintings in the dining room.”

“Well, calligraphy isn’t my strong suit, but we could sketch out the illuminated letters lightly on the canvas boards and then paint them. I think it would look cool. Two very good ideas.”

“My last one is for the bathroom. I was thinking we could use a coupon and buy a really large canvas. You can paint some kind of faux aquarium.”

“That’s a fun idea too. We’ll watch for a good coupon and I’ll start looking up photos of aquariums and we can pick one. You’re going to keep me busy painting. What are you going to be doing?”

“Sewing.”

“Seems reasonable. Any more artistic ideas?”

“Not at the moment.”

“Alright, what is it about my family that has you concerned?”

“Mostly that I’ve never met any of them and I have no idea what to expect. Fear of the unknown.”
“Well, a few of them have personalities similar to Aunt Eunice and will pinch your cheeks and tell you how cute or adorable you are.”

“I see.”

“The men are more likely to judge you by your handshake. A good firm handshake is a sign of an upright and honorable man.”

“You’re joking.”

“Pretty much.”

“Sam!”

“They will all shake your hand firmly though. I’ll teach you later. You’ll get your fair share of back slaps and hands resting on your shoulders. Again, I’ll demonstrate that for you later. My extended family is all pretty touchy-feely. They’ll all know we’re married. I’m sure my mom has regaled your many talents to anyone who would listen. And of course, they all know I got scholarships to college and I’ll be congratulated repeatedly because not many of them have gone to college.”

“Homophobic aunts or uncles, cousins?”

“No to the aunts and uncles. My cousins are all under 12.”

“PDA levels?”

“That’s not really something I ever paid attention to. We’ll start with standing close and we’ll observe. We’ll just follow their lead.”

“Alright. Sleeping arrangements?”

“Married couples sleep together. We’ll have our own room.”

“Which Stevie and Stacey will try to crash.”

“Inevitably, yes. But we’ll send them back to my parents room when it’s time for them to go to sleep.”

“Okay.”

“Feel better?”

“Yes. I trust you. If you say they’re going to be respectful, then I believe you.”

“Book time?”

“Except I don’t want to move, but I will. We could shower first, and then get under the covers and snuggle.”

“Naked snuggles?” Sam asked.

“If you want.”

“What about what you want?”
“Naked snuggles it is then.” Kurt smiled, rolled over, and headed for the bathroom.

Friday morning, they left as soon as they had eaten breakfast. They had packed the Navigator with all of the boxes from their room, leaving the ones with the clothes that Kurt was going to sell at the back. They drove to Columbus to the best resale shop Kurt knew of. They dropped the items off and went out looking through the nearest second-hand furniture shops and Goodwills.

“What about this?” Sam asked.

“Wow, that is in really rough shape, but it’s the right size.”

Sam began examining it. “The top drawer is trashed, but the other two are in good shape. I saw some dressers that had been redone to be TV consoles that they had deliberately taken the top drawers out of to make a place to put the DVD player and stuff.”

“That’s an idea. And I won’t feel bad drilling holes in the top of something we only pay $10.99 for.”

“We can put casters on the bottom if we run some wood pieces underneath where they can’t be seen. We brought your dad’s sander back with us just in case we found something.”

“We’ll give it a try. If nothing else, we can use it until we find something we love.”

They paid for it, loaded it up, and went back to the resale shop and picked up what they didn’t take and the cash. From there they drove to Ikea. When they got there, they didn’t have to wait long for Nick and Jeff to get there. They did their best to make it through quickly, grabbing the things on their lists. They drove north for 15 minutes to get to the outlet mall. They parked next to each other.

“So, who’s ready for some shopping?” Kurt said expectantly.

“Well, you and me, obviously,” Jeff said, as he put his arm around Kurt’s shoulders. “I’m not so sure about those two.”

Nick and Sam put on big fake smiles.

Jeff rolled his eyes. He stepped away from Kurt and took Nick’s hand and patted it. He spoke in a soft soothing voice like he was trying to calm an injured child. “It won’t hurt at all. I promise.”

Sam laughed. “Let’s get this show on the road. What kind of jeans do you like?”

Nick said, “Levi’s.”

“Alright then, let’s start there,” Kurt said. “We can talk about the rest of what you need while you find jeans you like.”

Nick said, “Eight pairs of jeans, three pairs of sweats, four hoodies, four button-ups, three henleys, waterproof boots, a rain coat, a winter coat, two hats, two pairs of gloves, sneakers, Sperry’s, a backpack, three polos, four t-shirts, several packs of socks, and three pairs of shorts.”

“And a partridge in a pear tree,” Kurt sang.
“Very funny,” Nick said.

Kurt responded, “I thought so. Is there anything else you can think of?”

“I think I want to go back to the Columbia store and grab one of those fleece zip-ups. I’ve been thinking about it since we were in there,” Jeff said.

“Me too, actually,” Nick agreed. “I think if we got dark ones, like navy or black or dark green that they could be worn with super casual clothes or the button-ups. I think we need something in between raincoat and winter coat. And they had some nice stainless insulated bottles in there. I’m thinking two of those would be good, so we wouldn’t waste money buying coffee or water.”

“Alright then, last stop back at the Columbia store.”

They backtracked a bit to the Costco not far from Ikea. They bought what they needed and got in line.

“Do you guys have hangers for all those clothes you just bought?”

“No,” Nick said. “I hadn’t even thought about it. Come with me to show me the best ones to get.”

Nick and Kurt took off to the household goods section and returned quickly with four packs of hangers and a pack of wood hangers for their coat closet. Kurt brought a pack of wood ones for their coat closet as well.

“Let’s grab a hot dog before we go,” Sam said. “We’ve got a 2-hour drive ahead of us still.”

“Good idea,” Jeff said. He steered their cart back to the snack bar.

Kurt and Sam took everything inside except their new project. Once they had the food put away, they headed to Lowe’s to get the additional wood they needed for the bottom so they could attach the casters and turn the top drawer section into a shelf for the DVD player and the Wii. A knowledgeable employee helped them find what they needed quickly and cut the wood to the right size for them. They thanked her, checked out, and went to Michael’s to use the 60% off coupons they had gotten in their email before they went back to the house.

Once they had everything inside, they carried their project pieces and the tools they brought with them out back. They changed into work shorts and went out shirtless to work on sanding and fixing the mini dresser up. Kurt took a “before” shot and put his phone back inside. They carried the mini dresser out to the shaded part of the yard and used the long extension cord they brought with them. They spent the rest of the afternoon working on it. Before dinnertime, they cleaned everything up and brought it back inside.

“We can stain it tomorrow and let it sit in the shade to dry,” Sam said. “Let’s shower and eat something before we go to Nick and Jeff’s to start our Season Three Warehouse 13 marathon.”

“Your Season Two DVDs are over there,” Nick pointed to one of the shelves near the TV.

Sam nodded.
Nick put the first DVD in and sat back down next to Jeff.

Sam said, “I really like your sectional. It’s cool that it has that huge ottoman that fits against this long side. It makes it like a bed almost. All four of us can sit with our feet up and snuggle up. But you can also move it around and seat like seven or eight people. Or you can push it up closer to the TV and some people can sit on it and play video games and other people can sit on the sectional like the day when everyone was over here.”

“We like it a lot,” Jeff said. “We wanted a lot of people to be able to sit down, but we wanted recliners too. This was the compromise we decided on since we couldn’t find anything bigger than a loveseat recliner. And we didn’t like the sectionals with recliners in them because they had these console things between them, similar to your Nav. It lifted up and you can store snacks and your remote in it and it had two drink holders in it. We wouldn’t have been able to snuggle.”

Kurt said, “This is very snuggly. Good choice.” He scooted closer to Sam and started to play footsie with him.

Nick hit play. They watched three episodes before Kurt and Sam headed back to their own place for the night. Kurt grabbed their Season Two DVDs on the way out.

Saturday they spent the morning staining the mini dresser, inside and out, after they attached the new wood pieces and casters to the underneath. They stained the new shelf for it as well. They spent the rest of the morning and afternoon emptying boxes and putting things away.

“I didn’t take into consideration the lack of a place to put the laundry basket,” Kurt said. “We’re either going to have to leave ours sit out in the room or we could get two smaller ones and slide them under the end of the bed and move the camping gear so it’s under the head of the bed instead of under my side of the bed.

Sam looked around. “I don’t really like the idea of it sitting out, but I guess we can put it next to the dresser until we get two smaller ones. We’ll take the tape measure to make sure we get ones that will fit. We also need to come up with a way to plug the TV, DVD player and Wii in and we need the Velcro strapping you talked about.”

Kurt added the Velcro to his list. “We’ll work on figuring out the issue of plugging the stuff in before we go anywhere. Let’s go empty the boxes in our … Office? Study? Studio?”

“Studio is an interesting choice. I’m not sure. I think we’ve mostly called it the ‘other room’ so far.” He followed Kurt into the other room.

They emptied the boxes of stuff and organized everything onto the shelving that was in the back left corner of the room.

“I don’t remember a box like this,” Sam said.

“Just open it and let’s see. If it’s Nick and Jeff’s we’ll take it over there.”

Sam opened it and it was pieces of wood. He pulled out a sheet of paper. “An H-frame easel? It’s not Nick’s or Jeff’s, but we didn’t bring this with us.”

“Let’s put it together,” Kurt scooted closer to the box and started taking the pieces out and laid them out neatly.
“You’re avoiding answering me. Where did this come from?”

“I wanted you to have a really nice easel to paint on here at home. You’ve made do all year using a tiny desktop easel, which you can still use for small paintings, if you want.”

“You bought this for me?”

Kurt nodded.

“It’s beautiful, but it’s too much.”

“It’s not. If I didn’t have a sewing machine and you had the money to buy one for me, what would you say if I said what you just said to me?”

“I’d want you to have it and enjoy it.”

“Sweetie, I love you. Please, let’s put it together.”

Sam leaned forward and kissed Kurt. He helped take the rest of the pieces out of the box. They opened the sheet with the directions. Kurt went to grab the screwdriver they needed. He came back to find Sam wiping his eyes. Kurt kneeled next to him and used his thumbs to wipe away Sam’s tears.

“If you really don’t want it, we can pack it up and I’ll send it back.”

“It’s not that I don’t want it. It was just a big shock. I used this kind in class at OSU and they’re awesome. And now I have one of my own. Thank you.”

“I saw the ones at OSU and I figured if colleges used them, they must be good, so I looked online and found one. We didn’t have room for one like this in our bedroom, but we have plenty of room for it in here.”

Kurt opened the bag of nuts and bolts and they started assembling it.

“I think we’ll need to get some of those felt pieces to keep furniture from scratching the floor like we did for the dining chairs and our desk chairs,” Sam said.

“Actually, we have some left. I put all the odds and ends stuff in one of the kitchen drawers since we didn’t have any of my organizing boxes here. Let me go get them.” He came back with the package. “We have 12 left. We still need to put some under the coffee table, if we’re going to put our feet up on it. We can do that when we finish this room.” They turned the easel on its side and put the felt floor protectors over the plastic disk feet. They stood it up and Kurt pushed it so that it was up against the corner shelf section. “It folds flat if we need to clear all of the floor space for the air mattress at some point in time.”

“It’s perfect. I never really thought I’d own an easel like this. I was going to wait for another coupon and buy one of those folding metal ones.”

“You might need one of those for class if you’re going to paint outside sometimes. You can just wait and see if your instructor tells you to buy a certain type.”

Sam pulled Kurt into a hug. “Thank you. You’re awesome. And I love you so much.”

“I love you too.” When Sam let go of him, he looked around the room. “I think we’ve got the desk lamps we bought and that’s it.”
They took them out of the boxes and put one on each end of the desk. Kurt climbed under the table and plugged them in.

“These should help a lot,” Sam said, as he turned both of them on. “I was used to our work table being up against the window and getting all of the light from outside, but the window isn’t on this wall.”

Kurt got back up and looked. “You’re right. I think those will be fine.” He flipped them back off. “Let’s grab the boxes and put them all back in the Navigator.”

Sam looked back at his easel and smiled as he followed Kurt out.

Sunday morning they applied a coat of polyurethane to the dresser before they left to go out and get the odds and ends they needed to finish up their projects. When they came back, Kurt put their bags on the kitchen counter and pulled Sam to the bathroom for a quick shower. He put the next CD in and they spent their afternoon snuggling and listening to the book.

At dinnertime, they brought the mini dresser back inside and after they ate, they went back to Nick and Jeff’s for their third installment of their *Warehouse 13* marathon.

Kurt cut the felt pads the right shape to fit the TV’s “feet”. Sam held the TV in place while Kurt ran the narrow Velcro strapping through the holes they had drilled in the top of the dresser. He got them fastened securely and Sam let go, but kept his hands nearby. Kurt pushed the dresser around a little and even jiggled it to make sure it was going to stay in place. They had devised a system to plug the three devices in and not having multiple cords coming out of the back of the dresser. They hooked the DVD player and the Wii up to the TV.

“I’d say it’s a success. It looks way better than it did and it does exactly what we need it to. Let’s roll it back towards the patio door so I can get a good “after” photo.”

Kurt took a couple of shots and they moved it back into the living room and put it on the short wall near the sofa. “Next time we’re here, we’ll work on our wall decorations.” He stepped closer to Sam and wrapped his arm around him. “It looks good in here.”

“I think so too. I’ll take the TV box out to the Navigator. Let’s eat lunch, and then take a nice long bath.”

“You have such good ideas.”
Kurt and Sam were still following their plan of working 10-hour shifts four days a week. When they got off Friday, they headed straight from the shop to their place. They pulled up a little after 8:30. They took a quick shower, put pajamas on, and texted Jeff to open their patio door.

“Pizza’s on the counter. Help yourselves. We’ve got the DVD loaded and ready to start.”

“Thanks,” Kurt said. “I like the new parking spaces. That was an inspired idea to put basically 8 sidewalks leading to our fence.”

“I sort of zoned out when Jerry was explaining something about driveway restrictions and access and something about too much concrete.”

Kurt laughed. “Well, what he did works, but makes it a longer walk for the two of you to your front door.”

“Meh. We’ll live. It’s way, way closer than parking in a huge parking lot and walking to a dorm room. And plus, the street in front of this side house is a lot busier than the street your side of the house faces. That’s probably why the garage opened to the side instead of the front to start with when it was built.”

“That’s true,” Kurt agreed. “I didn’t think about it the day you said you had to talk to the neighbors about standing on their property to clean and restain the fence. They were home. Does that mean that they aren’t students?”

“They are not. The people behind us are about our parents’ age. It was a lady about our parents’ age that answered the door. Next to us is an older guy, maybe old enough to be our grandpa, maybe not quite that old. I didn’t ask questions about any other people living in the houses, but if there are students living there, they live with an older family member or something.”

Sam said, “That means there’s a pretty good chance we won’t be having keggers at the neighbors’ to live through on the weekends.”

“Unless they’re middle-age to not-quite-old-enough-to-retire keg party throwers,” Jeff said.

“Let’s hope not,” Kurt said, as he rolled his eyes.

He and Sam piled some slices of pizza onto their plates and sat down on the sofa. Nick pressed play. They watched three episodes before heading back to their place for the night.

“Tomorrow morning, we’re going out on our walking tour of the area still, right?” Sam asked.

“Definitely, but not too early. We’re sleeping in compared to Kurt. How about 9:00?”

Kurt said, “Sure. And if I knew where the ‘sleep in’ button in my brain was, I’d press it when I’ve stayed up late. Thanks for the pizza. We’ll watch the two bonus episodes plus any other special features tomorrow night.”

Nick said, “Sounds good. We’ll see you in the morning.” He opened the patio door and locked it after they were outside.
Kurt pulled the covers back and flopped on the bed. Sam turned some music on, the overhead light off, and got in bed.

“C’mere,” Sam said. “Come be the big spoon and snuggle me.”

“As you wish.” Kurt scooted up and wrapped himself all around Sam and slid his arm under Sam’s pillow to get even closer.

Sam chuckled. “Westley would be impressed.”

“We haven’t watched that in a while. That should move to the top of our viewing list.” He kissed Sam’s shoulder. He pressed in and breathed in deeply through his nose. “You smell so good.” He yawned. “I’m so tired. I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“When your dad said it was three blocks from campus, he must have meant three long blocks to the point on the map that said Kent State,” Kurt said as the four of them walked towards campus.

“I don’t know where he was measuring from, but we’re only around the corner and down one block from Main Street. The other is side of Main Street is the edge of campus,” Nick said. “Walking past Taco Bell every day might test my willpower.”

They turned left when the got to Main Street and walked for quite a while before crossing the street to the campus side.

“This Mexican restaurant looks like the end of the commercial part of the street,” Nick said.

They started walking back towards campus.

Jeff looked through the photos on his phone and said, “We’ve seen a Mexican place, a Japanese place, a chicken place, a smoothie place, two mini-mart gas stations, a grocery store, a Chinese place, Arby’s, a pizza place, a couple of restaurants that we couldn’t tell what they serve including a buffet of some sort, a Thai place, Taco Bell, a grill, Starbucks, and Pizza Hut. We’ve walked the other direction before. There’s Burger King, Dunkin’ Donuts, Wendy’s, Papa John’s, Chipotle, another pizza place, a liquor store, an art supply place, and a used CD and DVD shop.”

Sam said, “Taking pics was a good idea.”

“It was faster than opening a note app and writing everything down.”

“I want to check out the art store and the music and DVD store some time.”

“Of all the things you just listed, I didn’t hear anything about a coffee shop that isn’t Starbucks,” Kurt said. “That’s something I’ll have to look for – a place to indulge my coffee-loving side once in a while. And at some point, I’d like to try the ethnic foods I’ve never tried before.”

When they got to the edge of campus they veered off the sidewalk along Main Street and headed into the campus itself. The walked around the outer edge of the campus and looked around. When they got around to the part that had a lot of the classroom buildings, they began to recognize the places they had been on their campus tour.
“This is where I’ll be headed most the time, I think,” Nick said, as they walked past the architecture department building. That art store is across Main Street and down just a little to the west, to the left.”

“Anyone mind if we look?” Sam asked.

“Sure, why not?” Jeff asked.

They looked through the art store and the CD/DVD shop before they headed back in the direction of the house. They walked past all of the places that Jeff had named earlier.

“The upside is that there’s no Panera along this street,” Sam said. “Danger is not lurking in the immediately vicinity.”

“Well, that’s good to know that I’m safe from whatever danger Panera poses,” Jeff said.

“Cookies and muffins and bagels and paninis and other things that are dangers to my waistline and bank account.”

“I see. Oh, we forgot to tell you that our appeal was denied,” Jeff said. “We’re working on Plan B.”

“What’s Plan B?” Sam asked.

“Not quite complete yet,” Nick said.

“Alright. You’re still going with us to the lake to swim this afternoon, right?” Kurt asked.


“Dress to swim,” Kurt said. “Bring clothes to change into after we shower. We’re going to go to Michael’s, Target, and Dollar Tree afterwards. Plus, maybe some other places. I saw this place called Ollie’s, which is some kind of discount store. There’s a Plato’s Closet and other stores.”

“Download the coupon from Michaels and we’ll give you cash for what we’re going to get. We’ll do the same thing once you figure out what you want to hang on the walls. We can all go and use four coupons at once.”

“We can do that,” Nick said.

They stopped at the edge of the sidewalk up to Kurt and Sam’s.

Kurt asked, “So, does 30 minutes give you two enough time to be ready?”

“Yeah,” Jeff said. “We’ll meet you at the Nav in 30 minutes.”

“This isn’t nearly as far away as I was expecting it to be,” Jeff said, as they turned into the park.

“It’s bigger than I expected it to be with this many parking spaces,” Nick said.

Kurt pulled into the closest spot to the bathhouse that he could find. They walked over to the beach part of the lake and swam and horsed around for about an hour. They grabbed their clothes from the Nav, showered and changed before they left.
“So, worthy of a repeat visit?” Kurt asked, as they were heading toward Cuyahoga Falls to do their shopping.

“I thought it was fun,” Jeff said. “There are trails too. We could go hiking when it get too chilly to swim.”

“I saw some other parks in this general area too,” Kurt said. “We can visit them at some point. Do you guys need to go anywhere in particular? We can stop at a grocery store or Sam’s Club for you guys. We’re not buying anything we’re not eating today or tomorrow because we’ll be in Tennessee next weekend and the weekend after that, we’re staying in Lima because Dad will be back that weekend.”

“I think we’re fine. We’re going back to Findlay on Monday,” Nick said. “We’re just along for the ride and the company. And to buy whatever it is you need from Michaels.”

About 10 minutes later, Kurt turned into the strip mall shopping center. They went inside Dollar Tree and bought 12 dark wood 8x10 frames. A few other odds and ends ended up in their cart as well. Jeff insisted on buying the four of them *Top Gun* style sunglasses.

“Put them on,” Jeff insisted when they got outside. “We have to position ourselves somehow for a selfie so the store name shows.”

“What are we doing this for?” Kurt asked.

“Just get over here and stand in front of Sam, next to Nick.” He handed his phone to Nick to try to get them all in the frame. He took his phone back and looked at the photo. “That’s good.”

“What are you doing with it?”

“Posting it to Sebastian’s Facebook page.” He finished what he was typing. “There.”

Kurt asked, “What did you type?”

“Paris may be the fashion capital, but you can’t find a place where you look as cool as we do for $4.00.”

Kurt laughed. He opened the back of the Navigator and they put their bags in. He drove across the parking lot and reparked. “Let’s go see what Ollie’s is.”

They looked around for about 10 minutes. They picked up a few food items, paid for them, and left.

Once they were outside, Kurt said, “It does sort of have a Big Lots feel to it. I don’t think we could count on buying anything in particular in there, but it would be a good place to stop if you already have a list of things you need to see if they have it cheaper than everywhere else.” He opened the back and they put their bags in. He drove them across the street to Michaels.

When they got out, Jeff said, “Cover Sam’s eyes quick!”

Sam tried to look around.

Jeff intervened and ushered him quickly towards the entrance to Michaels. “It’s for his own protection,” Jeff continued, acting like there was some real danger and he was some kind of bodyguard. “Move along. Inside the building, sir.” He pushed Sam through the door, still acting silly.
“What is going on?” Sam asked, thoroughly confused.

“Nothing you need to be concerned about now. You’re safe in here,” Jeff teased. “Come on. Let’s go find what we need.”

Kurt led the way to the canvases and the other items. He gave the other two the cash to buy what he handed them before they got in line. On the way out, Jeff used the large canvas he was carrying to block Sam’s view to the right.

Once they got the canvas in the cargo area nice and flat, Sam took the opportunity to look around quickly. He started cracking up. “There’s a Panera.” He pointed. “Jeff’s saving me from myself. Thank you.” He was still laughing as he got in the passenger seat. “Let’s get in Target before the siren bagels lure me inside.”

Kurt drove closer to Target and parked again. They went inside. Kurt grabbed two carts, sliding one to Sam, and made a beeline for the home storage area. He put a folding clothes-drying rack and a collapsible garment rack in Sam’s cart and the two largest laundry baskets that would fit under their bed in his. “Done,” he said.

“You’re sure?” Jeff said.

“Actually let’s check to see if they have grill covers here. We still haven’t gotten one.”

Twenty minutes later, Kurt pulled out of the parking lot. “Last requests?” He didn’t get any response, so he pulled out and headed back to the house.

Sam threw their swimming stuff in the washer and then joined Kurt in the shower.

“Hey, sweetie. Come closer and I’ll wash your hair. How about we shower quickly and then we soak in the tub for a while?”

“That sounds nice.” He let Kurt wash his hair and then picked up Kurt’s shampoo to do his. “When we get out I was thinking of going ahead and gluing all of the 8x10 frames together. We can let them dry for nearly 24 hours before we put the paintings in.” He rinsed Kurt’s hair. “Are you listening?”

“Not really. Sorry. I feels so good when you do my hair that I can’t really think.”

Sam kissed him. “It’s okay.” He grabbed his rag and began to wash and rinse quickly.

Kurt did the same. “You said something about the frames.”

As soon as Kurt rinsed off, Sam pulled the sprayer down and rinsed the tub. He pressed the lever to fill the tub and hung the sprayer back up. He pulled Kurt close and kissed him. “I was thinking of gluing them together when we get out. That way we can put the paintings in and hang it up before we head back to Lima tomorrow.”

“That’s a good idea. Why don’t we save the bath for tomorrow.”

“Okay.” Sam turned the water off and let the little bit that had started to fill the tub out. He got out and grabbed their towels and handed Kurt’s to him.

They redressed in some shorts and threw what they had worn that morning and that afternoon into
the washer with what was already in there and turned it on.

Kurt grabbed some newspaper and laid it out on the dining table and they disassembled the frames and wrapped the glass in the newspaper and taped each one so the glass couldn’t slip out. Once they finished, they laid all 12 frames out and worked together to glue them together and use the staple gun to hold the frames together to dry.

“I think we’re going to need to cut the box the drying rack came in to fit the back,” Kurt said.

“You’re right. I don’t think this is going to be sturdy enough to not bend or sag or something once we put all of the canvases in. We can use the staple gun and staple the cardboard to the back once we’ve gotten the paintings secured in the frames the way we want them.”

“We’ll just cut a little area out of the cardboard at the top where the saw blade hangers are.”

Once they had all of the frames together, they warmed up food they had defrosted and ate dinner before going over to Nick and Jeff’s to play their next round of Mouse Guard, after which they watched the remaining episodes of *Warehouse 13* and the special features.

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Kurt attempted to inch his way towards the edge of the bed, but the second time he moved just slightly, Sam’s arm tightened and pulled him back. He snuffled and buried his nose into the back of Kurt’s neck.

“Stay.”

“I was going to make you breakfast.”

“Cuddles.”

“You’re adorable and you know it, and you use it to keep me in bed.”

“Mmm.”

“I never use to lie around in bed. Before we moved, my bed was a convertible sofa.”

“Happier now,” he said with utmost confidence.

“Lying around in bed makes me happier? Interesting sleepy hypothesis.”

“Not hypethsis. S’ttrue.”

“Hyopethsis?” Kurt giggled. “You are sleepy.”

“Cuddles ‘n giggles.” He pressed his lips to the back of Kurt’s neck. “Love you.”

“I love you too.” Kurt relaxed in Sam’s arms. *Why am I trying to get up? I have what I’ve always wanted – someone who loves me just the way I am. This is one of his favorite things to do. Holding ME close is one of his favorite things to do.* He smiled and closed his eyes.

Kurt plated Sam’s omelette and handed it to him. Sam took it and kissed Kurt. They sat down in chairs, but held their plates and ate since the frames were still on the table drying.
“Let’s figure out the layout after we finish,” Sam said.

“I hope that using the staple gun and taping them was good enough since we don’t own 34 mini-clamps.”

“I guess we’ll see, but I hope so too. I’m going to get started on the fish tank canvas. I thought maybe you could prep the 11x14 boards so we can work on the illuminated letters during the week this week in the evenings. We can work on them in the dining room or outside if it’s nice. We just need to pick a style and get started.”

“I can do that.”

“You mentioned sewing.”

“I can work on that too.”

“I didn’t think you had any more projects you were working on.”

“Well, I came up with one.”

“Imagine that,” he teased. He leaned towards Kurt and offered him a kiss.

Kurt smiled and kissed him. “Remember that other fabric I bought and didn’t end up using for any of the curtains.”

“Vaguely.”

“I’ll show you before I do anything to it. It’s lightweight drapery fabric, so it’s 60 inches wide and I have three yards of it. I want to make floor-to-ceiling curtains to hang at the edge of our doorframe, blocking off that 3-foot section of the hall. I hang a lot of my clothes up to dry and with the washer and dryer being stacked, there’s nowhere to hang clothes to dry in the laundry closet. I want to stand that garment rack up and leave it up behind the curtain. We can put the folding rack in our room when we need to use it for our clothes. I’ll probably have both racks in our study some of the time too for projects I’m working on to keep the pieces neat and easy to get to as I’m working on something.”

“How are you going to hang it?”

“I was thinking a tension rod, but I’m not dead set on that option. I was going to use those rolling stainless hangers like we have for the shower curtain and I was going to put buttonholes in the top of the curtains like I did on the shower curtain. That way I can open them back easily. Trying to fight with the curtain while I’m hanging up wet clothes will just be annoying.”

“That makes sense.”

“We can ask Jerry his preferred method of hanging it when he’s here for Nick’s and Jeff’s birthday party in three weeks. We’re not going to be back here until that weekend anyway, but since we brought all of our stuff over here, I can’t really sew in Lima anymore.”

“I’ll pack up the colors of paint we’ll need for the illuminated letters and take it with us – and all of my paintbrushes.” He reached for Kurt’s plate and fork. He loaded them into the dishwasher and washed his hands before he went down the hall to the study to get the 12 paintings.

Kurt was drying his hands when Sam came back in the room. “I had everyone put their names on the bottom right corner on the back. That will help us figure out which side is up.”
They laid them all out on the floor and kept rearranging them until they came up with a layout that they both liked.

“Alright. To the study to paint and sew!” Sam said, using a Buzz Lightyear voice.

After lunch, they went to Nick and Jeff’s and played air hockey and video games for a while. About 2:00, the four of them went to Kurt and Sam’s.

“So, Nick, if you could hold the bottom right corner and the center down. And Jeff take the top left corner and somewhere near here. Sam can hold the bottom left corner and here.”

Everyone put their hands where Kurt had pointed. He picked up the first painting for the top left and put it in the frame. He used the staple gun around the edges to hold it in place. He grabbed the center painting next. They worked their way to the bottom.

“Now, the backing.” Sam grabbed the piece they had carefully cut earlier and lined it up on the back. “Same thing as before. Just help keep the cardboard exactly where it is for Kurt to staple it in place.”

Kurt stapled it in about 30 places. “Alright, let’s see it.”

They flipped it over carefully and laid it back on the table.

“It looks really cool,” Sam said. “I like it.”

“Me too,” Kurt said.

“They somehow look better than they did when we finished them,” Jeff said.

“Oh, I put two coats of gloss varnish on them to give them a finished look.”

They turned it back over to make a template to use to hang it up. They measured really carefully twice before Kurt put the small screw anchors in the wall. He inserted the long thin screws they bought and left just enough room for the saw blade hangers.

“Alright, let’s put it up,” Sam said.

He and Kurt carefully hooked the hangers over the screws and slowly let go and stepped back.

“It looks good,” Kurt said.

“I agree,” Sam said.

“Well, that’s done. Thank you for your help, kind sirs.” Kurt tipped an imaginary top hat.

Sam asked, “Have you two come up with any ideas?”

“We have, sort of,” Nick said. “In the living and dining room, what about just painting directly on the walls? We can get some small containers of whatever type of paint you’d need. That way when we have people over and they’re playing ping pong or hanging around in the dining room, going in and out the patio door there won’t be any chance of anyone actually knocking things off the walls.”

“You’d have to talk to your dad about that. Artistically, the only difference would be that I would
have to spend time at your place to do it, rather than doing the artwork in our study. But if you
want geometric patterns or words spelled out or whatever, we can cut those out of newspaper and
trace them with pencil onto the walls and I can paint them. You could just give us a key to your
place so I can work on it even if you’re not here at some point.”

Nick nodded.

“If you want to get an idea of what it would look like, take a picture of each wall where you can see
part of the room too. Then use Word and the blank publishing layout option and drop the photo
in. Then you can put shapes and words using different fonts and colors directly on the photo and
see what you like the best,” Sam said.

“Good idea,” Jeff said. “Let’s go back and do that. We can show your dad what it looks like when
we ask him.” He opened the patio door and stepped out.

“I’ll ask my dad and let you know. We’ll see you in a few weeks. Have fun in Tennessee. We’ll
have our minds made up by the time we see you again.”

Kurt said, “Have fun playing around. We’ll see you in a few weeks.”

Nick said, “See ya!” and slid the door shut.

Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt. “I like it.”

“Me too. When I see it, I remember them all sitting and standing around in the dining room
laughing and talking and painting.”

Sam kissed the side of his neck. “I love you.”

Kurt leaned back into him. “I love you too. I’ll sew and you can get the gesso out and tackle those
huge canvases.”

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A couple of hours later, Kurt and Sam were finally in the tub for the bath they had postponed the
day before.

“I think I’ve decided the last thing I’m going to splurge on,” Kurt said.

“What?”

“A waterproof Bluetooth speaker. I like having the stereo in our room so we can listen to books on
CD and all of our music CDs, but I’d like to be able to listen to music in the kitchen and in here and
in the living room. I’m going to do some research and find a good one.”

“M’kay.” He ran his hands down Kurt’s arms and kissed the back of his neck.

“We’ll do the sheets and towels before we go so they’ll be clean when we come back in a few
weeks. We need to pack still.”

“You’re not really relaxing.”

“You’re right. I’m sorry.” He took a deep breath and rotated a bit so he could kiss Sam. “Better?”

“Much.”
Kurt walked through one last time, making notes and checking everything before they left. He took a photo of the dining area with the collage to show everyone and to send to Sebastian and Dylan.

“I’ll be really glad that when we come back, the internet will finally be on. I’ve missed not being able to Skype when we’re here. We can give Dylan and Sebastian a virtual tour after we get the paintings up.” He stopped in the study. “I like the way the study looks now. The Wicked poster and our photo collages in the black frames and the three paintings from the day at the museum in Toledo all make the room feel finished now.” Satisfied nothing needed done in there, he moved on to their bedroom. “And our room feels complete with your paintings up too.”

“You were quick with those curtains today.”

“Just a bunch of straight seams, so it didn’t take that long. I still have the button holes to do along the top edge.” He looked around again. “I don’t see anything that we’ve missed.” He zipped up their suitcase, put it on the floor, and then grabbed the duffle and his satchel.

Sam grabbed his as well and popped the handle up on the suitcase. “Ready then?”

“Yeah.” He followed Sam out of the room. “It seems weird to not come back for so long, but I’m glad we’ve gotten everything ready for when we come back to stay. I gave Cassius my notice for the 9th. It seems so weird. I saw that tire shop when we were out on our walk. I’ll apply there if we run into money issues. I could walk there.”

“I know you feel torn about not working. I’ve been there.” He opened the front door and let Kurt step through. He locked the door.

“I know.” Kurt hit the unlock on his remote and they put everything in the back of the Navigator. “Hopefully, we didn’t leave anything we really need behind.” He shut the back and got in the driver’s seat.

Sam climbed in, shut his door, and leaned over to kiss Kurt before he put his seat belt on. “You were very thorough. If we have to have something, we’ll just have to buy whatever it is.”

“You pick the music.” He backed out and headed to Lima.

Monday evening when they got home from work, they worked on sketching the illuminated letters on the canvas boards until it was time for the season premiere of Warehouse 13. When the episode ended, they took the four boards upstairs and put them on the shelves in their room.

“Well, that was a depressing episode,” Kurt said. “I’m glad it wasn’t the season finale. Maybe they come up with some way to undo all of that.”

“I hope. The scene of Claudia running up the stairs and going in that room, ugh.”

“Next week’s episode better be at least a little fun. It’s supposed to be fantasy and sci fi, not a tragedy. Escapism. If I wanted tragedy, I’d watch the news.”

“Let’s just get ready for bed. I think we should go shopping tomorrow for one of those speakers you were talking about. I miss our music already.”
“We’ll do it when we get off.” Kurt tossed his clothes into the basket in the closet. “It’s weird with the closet half empty.”

“All the more space to make out with you, my dear,” Sam said in his best big bad wolf imitating a granny voice.

Kurt broke out laughing. “That was fantastic. Absolutely perfect. I love you so much. You bring so much joy to my life.” Kurt wrapped his arms around Sam and hugged him.

“I love hearing you laugh. And I love you too. Let’s go make out in the shower.”

“J-26”

“That’s everything,” Kurt said, as he closed the back door. “All that’s left is to shower and change.”

“And grab our sandwiches and carrots and our coffee and water.”

“That too.”

Once they were back downstairs, they grabbed their stuff from the kitchen. They set the house alarm on the way out and got in Carole’s car. Sam put the thermoses of coffee in the cup holders for the backseat and the water in the front. He put their food between them. They buckled up and headed out.

Kurt looked at the clock on the dash. “6:35. We did good. We should get there in time to read to them before they go to sleep.” He backed out of the driveway. “It’s weird driving a car. It will save us about $75 in gas by taking it instead of the Navigator, though.”

“It was nice of Carole to let us take it.”

“She so sweet to me – and you. I honestly didn’t know what to expect when they started dating and then when they got married. But she’s just blended right in and been a mother figure without trying to take my mom’s place.”

“She is super nice. She’s been like that with me too. She’s just very mom-like – maternal and nurturing.” He switched subjects. “I haven’t been to the Smoky Mountains in ages.”

“My dad and I went once when I was 11. We went to Dollywood. It was between fourth and fifth grade. It was a lot of fun.”

“I’ve never been to Dollywood. I bet it was cool.”

They pulled up and parked in front of the Evans’ place at 9:15. They grabbed their bags and headed up to the house. Sam texted Mary that they were there. She opened the door a couple of minutes later. They stepped inside and she closed the door.

She immediately hugged Sam, and then Kurt. “I’m so glad to see the two of you. I’ve been asked at least fifteen times how much longer they had to wait for you to get here.”

Sam laughed. “Let’s see what happens.” He reached back and opened the door quietly and shut it much more loudly than necessary.

“SAMMY!!” Stacey squealed as she barreled out of the hallway. She crashed into Sam and
hugged him.

Stevie wasn’t far behind. “You’re finally here.”

“We are. We got caught in some unexpected traffic on the north side of Cincinnati. Do you have the book ready?” Kurt asked.

“We do,” Stacey said.

“Then, let’s go get reading. You need to go to sleep soon. We have big plans for tomorrow.”

“We know,” Stevie said. “Well, we don’t exactly know, since it’s a surprise, but we’re excited.

Kurt and Sam dropped their bag in Stevie’s room and went into Stacey’s room. Both kids had climbed into Stacey’s bed. Sam pulled the covers up. Kurt picked up the book and began to read to them. When he finished, he put the book on dresser.

“We’ll see you two in the morning,” Sam said. He kissed them both on the forehead.

They went out into the living room and sat down to talk to Dwight and Mary.

“So, you’re taking them to the children’s museum in Knoxville?” Mary asked.

“Yes,” Sam answered. “And to a natural history museum that I can’t remember the name of right now.”

“Okay. You have the directions to the cabin. Quite a few people will already be there when you arrive. We won’t get there until somewhere around 10:00.”

Dwight pulled his wallet out and handed Sam a $20 bill. “Use this to get lunch for the four of you.”

Sam didn’t immediately reach for it.

Mary said, “Sam, honey. Take the money. If you don’t want to use it for the four of you, at least buy Stevie and Stacey lunch with it and use the other half towards their tickets.”

He nodded and put the money in his own wallet.

Kurt broke the tension by pulling his phone out and showing the two of them the photos of their place in Kent.

Kurt and Sam went out in the backyard, around to the side away from where Stevie and Stacey were sleeping. Kurt took his phone out and Skyped Sebastian. As soon as he picked up, the two of them started to sing.

… Happy Birthday to you!

Sebastian said, “You two are crazy. Thank you. It’s what 6:00 in the morning there? Where are you two?”

“Yes. We’re outside the Evans’ house so we won’t wake Stevie and Stacey up,” Kurt said.
Sam asked, “Any fun plans?”

“Dylan and I are going out dancing tonight. A dinner and movie before that. We’re getting ready to eat lunch with Maman and my aunt, uncle and cousins. Maman invited them over for lunch.”

“That sounds like fun. We’re taking Stevie and Stacey to two museums in Knoxville and then driving to the cabin from there. We’ll email you pictures and maybe post some on Facebook next week.”

Sam said, “Tomorrow we’re going up to the top of the mountain. Then, a day at the cabin. Monday, the aquarium is on our agenda.”

“Sounds fun. Dylan and I should go to the aquarium here. I’ve never been and I doubt he has. I’m going to go start visiting a lot of places.”

“Good. If I were there, I’d visit every place I possibly could.”

“I know. You made me think about a lot of things. My Maman is very pleased with my reformation.”

Kurt laughed. “Tell her ‘hi’ from us. I hope you have a really great birthday.”

“It’s been enjoyable so far.” He waggled his eyebrows.

Kurt shook his head and rolled his eyes. “The internet will be on the next time we’re in Kent and we’re planning a virtual tour for the two of you. We’ll set a time soon.”

“Okay. Thanks for calling.” Sebastian disconnected the call.

“I miss him still. We need to go to Paris.”

“We’ll save up.”

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Later that evening after spending the day at the two museums in Knoxville, the four of them pulled up to the cabin. Sam got out and went up on the porch and knocked to make sure they were in the right place. When his Aunt Martha opened the door, he motioned for everyone to get out of the car. Stevie and Stacey came barreling up to the porch. They stopped briefly to hug Martha, and then headed straight through the door in search of their cousins.

“Downstairs,” she pointed towards the stairway. “Go around the back. The stairs down are on the other end.”

Kurt had their bags and followed Sam and Martha inside.

“It’s so nice to finally meet you, Kurt. Mary has told me such nice things about you.”

“It’s nice to meet you too. Where should we put these?”

She led them downstairs to a room with a queen bed and a small closet and a small bathroom. “This room has its own bathroom, but it’s so small no one with kids could use it since there’s no room for anyone to do anything but walk around the bed in here.”

“A phenomenal private bathroom and an itty bitty living space,” Sam said, imitating the genie in Aladdin.
Kurt and Martha both laughed.

“The bathroom opens on the other side, so be sure to lock both doors if you don’t want company. Dinner will be ready in about 30 minutes.”

“Thanks,” Sam said.

“I’ll let you settle in and then you can introduce Kurt to everyone.” Martha left them to go check on the kids.

Kurt and Sam unpacked their clothes. They hung the shirts in the small closet and put their other stuff on the shelf above the hanging rod. When they finished, they grabbed Stevie and Stacey’s sleeping bags with their pajamas rolled inside to take back upstairs with them.

When they got upstairs, Sam asked, “Aunt Martha, where’s my parents’ room. We have the kids’ sleeping bags.”

She led them to a room down a hall. “In there.”

Before everyone sat down to eat, Sam had everyone group up quickly.

“You met Aunt Martha. That’s her husband John and their kids, Sarah and Billy.”

Kurt stepped forwards and shook hands with John. “It’s nice to meet you, sir.”

“You too.”

Kurt nodded and smiled.

Sam continued. “My dad’s brother Uncle Daryl and his wife Aunt Kenna. Lisa, Robby and Bonnie.”

Kurt shook Daryl’s hand as well.

“My dad’s sister Aunt Denise and her husband Uncle Larry. Gina, Benji, and Danny.”

Kurt shook Larry’s hand.

“And my dad’s parents, Mark and Kim, but we all call them Nana and Pawpaw.”

Kurt shook Mark’s hand.

“It’s nice to meet all of you.”

“My mom’s parents’ names are Charlie and Helen Nelson, but everyone calls them Granny and Grandpa. They will be here tomorrow morning, along with Auntie Margaret and Auntie Caroline. They’re Granny’s twin sisters and they’re best friends with Nana.”

Kurt nodded. “I’ll do my best to remember.”

“Honey, it’s fine,” Kim said. “We know there’s a lot of people to meet all at once. Everyone sit down so we can get the food served.”
Mary and Dwight made it right at bedtime for the kids. Mary came downstairs after they were finally lying down.

“Thanks for taking them today. They were both talking non-stop about how cool both of the museums were.”

“We had fun too,” Sam said.

“Did you decide what you’re going to do on Monday?”

“We’re going to the aquarium first thing in the morning in hopes that it will be less crowded then.”

“That should be fun,” Mary said.

“Burt and Carole gave both of us some money for graduation and we were both admonished that we were supposed to spend on something fun.”

“I see. Sounds like something they would say. They’re always saying how hard the two of you work and how you need to spend a little more time being young and having fun because you’ll be hardworking adults for the rest of your lives when you get out of college.”

“We hear the same thing from him,” Kurt said.

“We’re going up to the top of the mountains tomorrow. You two can ride with my parents so you can focus on the view rather than the road.”

“Thanks,” Kurt said. “That will make it more fun for us. We’ll see you in the morning.”

“Good night,” she said, as she stepped out the door, closing in behind her.

“Well, we have our own private room with a bathroom. It’s perfect. Time to go to bed.”

Kurt turned the lock on the door. He stripped down to his underwear, grabbed their toiletries bag, and went into the bathroom. Sam followed him. When they came back out, they lay down facing each other. They spent quite a while kissing before Sam turned over to be the little spoon. He scooted back and they got comfortable. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

At 7:02, there was a faint knock at their door. “Kurt, Sammy, let me in, please?”

Sam got up and opened the door just a little bit. “Hey Stacey. Give us a few minutes to get dressed, okay?”

“Okay, but hurry. I’ll wait right here by your door.”

He saw her turn around and sit down on the floor as he closed the door and locked it quietly.

Kurt sat up and stretched. “We’ve been summoned by her royal highness, haven’t we?”

“Yes.”

They got dressed, made the bed, and then let her in. She sat in the middle talking to them while they finished getting ready.
“I’m super excited were here. It’s going to be so cool to go up the rest of the way to the top of the mountains. Mommy says you can see really far from up there.”

“You can,” Sam assured her. “You never said anything about it yesterday. How is summer camp?”

“More fun that school, but also more boring.”

“What do you mean?” Kurt asked.

“Well, we do more fun stuff like art projects and we play more games, but we also don’t really learn any cool stuff about science or read any books. Maybe school could be just a little more fun and summer camp could be a little more interesting. It would be better that way.”

“I see your point,” Kurt said.

Stevie came barreling in the room. “Sammy!” He put his hand up to high-five Sam and then moved it before Sam managed to reach it. “Too slow old man.”

“Old man? I’m 19.”

“You’re married and have your own place. That makes you an old man.” He plopped onto the bed.

“Nah, that makes me a content and happy man.”

“Sammy’s not old. He just loves Kurt a lot.”

“That’s right, Stacey,” Kurt said. “And I love him a lot too.”

“You’re old too, Kurt.” Stevie laughed.

“Daddy didn’t say they were OLD men. He said they were GROWN men.”

“I know. I’m teasing them.”

“Are you two ready yet?” Stacey asked.

“Almost. We need coffee.”

“You ARE old,” Stevie said. “Old people drink coffee. Yuck! Mom let me taste hers once and it was disgusting.”

“Why don’t you run back upstairs and help Mom make us some coffee and we’ll be up in a few minutes. We need to fix our hair.”

Stacey added, “And put your shoes on. I’ll go help Mommy make coffee or maybe Aunt Martha already made some. She loves coffee.”

The two of them ran off.

“Old!” Kurt rolled his eyes. “He’s the one getting old – old enough to hassle you.”

“I know.” Sam went in the bathroom to finish up. He put his shoes on while Kurt finished up.

“Ready?” he asked when Kurt came out of the bathroom.
“Not quite yet.”

He edged around the bed and shut and locked the door. He lured Sam over with his index finger. When he got close enough, he surprised him by pushing him back toward the bed and making him fall into a sitting position when his calves hit the bed. Kurt straddled his lap and sat down. He pushed him back again, pinning him to the bed and kissed him passionately, much to Sam’s delight. Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt and kissed back enthusiastically and pulled Kurt down on top of him.

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As soon as they walked into the room, Stacey said, “That was more than a few minutes.”

Stevie said, “Your coffee is on the table. Sam’s is in the red cup.”

“Thanks,” Sam said.

“Your food is in the oven,” Stacey said. “Mommy went upstairs to get her bag and stuff. So did Aunt Martha. Everyone else is outside already.”

“We’ll eat quickly,” Kurt assured her.

“I’m going to stay here to make sure you do. You must have been lollygagging around down there. No more of that.” She crossed her arms and raised her eyebrows.

Kurt struggled not to laugh because she looked absolutely adorable trying to look stern. “We’ll not lollygag anymore this morning.” He pulled their plates out and put them on the table. Sam handed him a fork when he sat down. He slipped the oven mitts off and took the fork.

Stacey grabbed the oven mitts and put them back in the drawer that Kurt had gotten them out of. She sat back down at the table with them. “Granny and Grandpa are already here too. You two are riding up with them.”

“Okay,” Sam said. “What else do you know?”

“Everyone is outside playing around or looking at the view or something. Auntie Caroline and Auntie Margaret are riding with Nana and Pawpaw.”

“Got it,” Sam said, stuffing the last bite in his mouth.

She snatched his plate and put it in the dishwasher. Kurt was done when she came back. She took his plate too. She looked under the sink for something and pulled out a bottle of dishwasher detergent. She looked at the door carefully, filled the right slot, and shut the cover. She put the bottle back, went to the table, took their forks and cups, and put them in the dishwasher. She shut it, latched it, and read the buttons before pushing the right one. “Done. Let’s go, slowpokes.”

“No hugs for us?”

“You stayed downstairs during hug time.”

“When did you turn into Miss Bossy Pants?” Sam asked, holding his arms out for a hug.

She looked at him and caved. She ran into his arms. “I’m sorry. I’m just really excited and I’ve waited for ages go to the top of the mountain. I didn’t mean to sound ugly. I just want to go. Come on.”
“A word of advice for the future,” Sam said.

“Yes?” She looked up at him.

“We would not have lollygagged, if you had told us that everyone else was already dressed and ready to go. You had knowledge you did not share.”

“Oh. I didn’t think about how you hadn’t been up here to see that everyone else had already eaten. Sorry.”

“I’m not upset, but you got upset that we were too slow.”

“Next time, I’ll tell you who else is up.”

“Thank you,” Sam said. “And you’ve only known we were coming here for a few weeks.”

“Doesn’t matter. I’ve been waiting a long time.” She backed up and pulled him to the door.

Kurt followed behind them. Once they were outside, Dwight locked the cabin and the introductions started again.

Mary said, “These are my parents Helen and Charlie.”

Kurt extended his hand. “It’s nice to meet you, sir.”

Helen stepped forward and pulled him into a hug. “From everything we’ve heard, you’re a perfect match for our Sam. I’m so glad to meet you. These are my sisters, Caroline and Margaret.”

Kurt got pulled into two more hugs.


They toured Cades Cove first. They stopped at several churches and a couple of log cabins. They spent a while hiking around Abrams Falls. Kurt and Sam took photos with Kurt’s camera. After they left the falls, they visited the mill and watched the milling process. They stopped in the gift store and all of the kids were taken to the bathroom before they continued on. They stopped at several more cabins before they stopped at the picnic area.

Kurt and Sam helped Mary, Martha, and Kim hand out peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and bananas to all of the kids. After the kids were all settled at picnic tables eating, the adults sat down and ate their sandwiches. They talked a little and Kurt learned a little about everyone.

Once the kids were finished, Dwight and Mary let them play for a little bit and took them all to the bathroom again. Kurt and Sam continued to talk to everyone else while they cleaned up and repacked the car.

They headed back towards the Sugarland Visitor’s Center and started the trek up the mountainside. They stopped at the lookout out points on the way up. They did a little hiking along a stream as well. When they got to the top, they took in the view from the parking lot area before they hiked their way up to Clingmans Dome.

Stacey said, “The trees up here aren’t pretty. The pretty ones were all lower.”

“We’re too high up for those types of tress,” Kurt said. “This is the wrong biome for them.”
“What’s a biome?”

“It the word scientists use to describe the area a plant or animal lives in. You know that there are no butterflies where it’s frozen all year round and polar bears don’t live in Tennessee.”

“There are mostly black bears here.”

“Right. Well, as you go higher up a mountain, there are tree lines. Those lines are where certain types of trees can’t grow. The higher up you go, the fewer types of trees can survive in the environment.”

“Why?”

Sam said, “Usually due to a lack of rain or because it’s too cold.”

“Oh. Okay. It is a lot colder up here than it was at the park at lunch. So, if we planted some of the pretty trees up here, they would just die?”

Kurt nodded. “Yeah.”

“Alright. It’s really cool that we can see so far from up here, though.”

“It is,” Sam agreed.

Kurt turned the map he was holding and showed her places on the map, and then pointed out in the distance where they could see the place in the distance. Stevie came over to see what they were doing and the other kids followed him. After about ten minutes, the kids got tired of looking out at the trees and wanted to go back to the area where they could hike around and play. Kurt and Sam stayed back just a few minutes to enjoy the view on their own.

Sam stepped up behind him and wrapped his arms around Kurt and turned them around. He took his phone out and took a selfie of them with the mountains in the background. Kurt handed Sam his camera and he took another couple shots. They turned back around and took in the view one more time before leaving the lookout area. They walked back down hand in hand and met up with everyone at the bottom.

When they got in the car, Helen said, “We’re going to go into Gatlinburg while everyone else heads back to the cabin or to the grocery store. We figured the two of you might like at least a little time to browse the shops. Charlie and I will go sit down by the stream and get a drink or browse for a while ourselves.”

“Thanks, Granny. That would be nice. It’s been years since I was here and Kurt came once when he was 11.”

“Maybe I can find something nice for Carole for Mother’s Day.”

“Mother’s Day was ages ago,” Helen said.

“Well, next weekend we are having a Parents’ Day because my dad and Carole were in DC on Mother’s Day and Father’s Day this year.”

“I see. I imagine being a Congressman keeps him busy.”

“It does. He hasn’t given up the shop and turned it over to Cassius, the manager, so when he’s in town, he still goes in and works when he can. And he still keeps tabs on everything.”
They didn’t talk too much on the way down because they didn’t want to distract Charlie. They stopped a few times on the way down to let the brakes cool down and they got out and walked around and talked then. When they got down to Gatlinburg, Charlie pulled into a parking garage. They decided on a time to meet back up and went their separate ways.

“So what did you two find that you couldn’t live without?” Helen asked good-naturedly, as they got in the car.

“Well, our friend Sebastian got us these key chains that we both really like with swivel claw clasps and we saw some leather ones we thought my dad and Carole might like.” He took them out and showed them to her. “This one can slide onto my dad’s belt and blend in and it has this nice stainless chain down to a swivel claw clasp that can fasten to his key ring, so it will hang in his pocket and not fall out or get pickpocketed.”

“Nice.” She put Burt’s back and pulled the other one out. “I like this one. I might think about getting one of these.” She examined the one for Carole. “I like how it has the claw clasp instead of a snap to open it to fasten around a purse strap. I’ve seen the snap ones before, but eventually snaps give out. This could be replaced if it breaks.”

“That’s what I thought. And she can fasten it to a belt loop if she’s wearing casual clothes and not taking her big purse.”

“Nice choices.” She handed them back to Kurt. “What’s in your bag Sam?”

“Belts. I got this really nice soft smooth black leather belt and Kurt got one like it except that it has these stainless steel studs in it that will go with his combat boots.”

“The belts here are usually really durable.”

“That’s what I’m hoping,” Kurt said. “I’ve bought several that just didn’t hold up.”

They talked about school and the things they both wanted to study on their drive back to the cabin.

When they got there, the grill was going and a lot of cooking and food prep was going on inside. Kurt and Sam took their shopping bags down to their room and found that all of the kids were in the lower level playing ping pong, pool, and foosball.

“Sammy! Kurt! You’re back!” Stacey hug tackled Sam.

“We are. Let’s us put our bags in our room and then we’ll watch you play foosball.”

They pulled a couple of stools over and sat against the wall and watched them all play. About a half-hour later, they were all summoned upstairs. The kids got in line and were helped by the adults to get their food. They sat around the table and ate while more food was cooked and grilled. Kurt and Sam waited to eat with the adults. Once the kids finished they took off back downstairs and the adults filled their plates and sat around the table and ate.

Dwight said, “If you two want to go hiking before it gets dark, there’s a trail that leads from the back for about a mile and a half and comes out down the road a bit. You can just walk back up the road when you come out.”
“That sounds nice,” Kurt said.

“The guy we rented the cabin from said there’s a clearing about two-thirds of the way around starting from this end. There’s some trees that have been turned into benches and you can see the sunset.”

Sam said, “We’ll definitely go check it out.”

“I’d say the best time would be from about 8-8:30, so I suggest you head out about 7:00. It’s not a super hard trail, but you certainly can’t walk it at the same clip you can walk on a flat surface. I walked down it a ways this morning.”

Kurt mostly listened through dinner, learning about what each person did for work still trying to get to know a little bit more about each person. When they finished, Kurt and Sam helped with the dishes. Once they were done, they grabbed hoodies and set out to hike the trail.

Kurt reached for Sam’s hand as they started down the path.

“Different place, but same activity,” Sam said. “You told me you loved me the first time when we were hiking.”

“I did. I loved you then. And I love you even more now.” Kurt squeezed his hand.

“The same is true for me.” He started to swing their hands as they walked. “Are you going to lure me into making out with you on the log bench?”

“Ma-ay-be.”

“Only maybe?”

“Maybe it’s your turn to lure me. Your family is nice. They’ve been really fun so far. I think the kids are really going to like what we brought.”

“Me too.”

They continued to follow the trail enjoying each other’s company. As they approached the clearing, the sunset came into view. The sky was changing from blue to pink. There were a few scattered cirrus clouds above the horizon, but not so many as to block the color from coming through them. They sat down on the log together. Kurt leaned towards Sam and kissed him and sat back up.

“A peck?”

“For now. We’re watching the sunset, remember?”

“And taking pictures so I can paint it later.”

They used the camera and both of their phones to see if they could capture the sky as it turned orange right below the top of the mountains. Kurt used the panorama feature on his phone and changed his camera settings to sunset. After a couple of minutes of photos, they put the camera and phones away and focused on watching the sunset. Kurt scooted closer to Sam and wrapped his arm behind him. Sam wrapped his arm around Kurt as well.

Once the sky started darkening, Kurt straddled the log and waited for Sam to do the same. He
scooted closer and put his feet up behind Sam on the log. They wrapped their arms around each other and just sat that way for a few minutes. Sam pulled back just enough that he could kiss Kurt.

“As much as I would like to make out with you, I just remembered one key difference between where we were making out before and now.”

“What’s that?”

“There are bears here and I’d rather not spook one on the way back. Let’s go while we can still see most of the way back.”

“Good idea.” He gave Sam one more quick peck and unwrapped his legs from around Sam’s waist and got up.

They had to turn their flashlights on the last ten minutes of the trail. They made their way back to the cabin still using the flashlights since there were no street lights on the gravel road the cabins were on. They knocked and were let back in.

“What did you think,” Mary asked.

“It was really beautiful,” Sam said.

“It was.”

“We’re putting the kids to bed now. If you want to join us, we’re all going to watch a movie downstairs as soon as we get them all in their sleeping bags.”

“What movie?” Sam asked.

“Smokey and the Bandit,” Mary said. “Your pawpaw and grandpa love that movie. They found a DVD of it downstairs earlier.”

“Sure,” Sam said. “We’ll go shower and put our pajamas on, if that’s okay.”

“Sure, honey.”  

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“That was funnier than I had anticipated it being,” Kurt said, as he got comfortable with his head on Sam’s chest.

“It was pretty funny.” He wrapped his arm around Kurt and played with the back of his hair.

“Are you sad that we didn’t wait until we could find a way for everyone to be in one place for our wedding?”

“No, not at all. I loved our wedding. It was perfect. Coming here with everyone is good enough. They all get to meet you and it’s kind of like the days we had with everyone in Lima after the wedding.”

“Okay.”

“I feel like we should contribute to the cost of being here. How can your parents afford this?”

“I’m not sure. I didn’t ask. I figured if they wanted me to know, they’d tell me. They are splitting the cost seven ways though, so that makes a big difference.”
“That’s true.” He reached up and guided Sam’s face towards his and kissed him. “I love you. I’m glad we came.”

“Me too. I love you too.”

Stacey knocked on their door. “Kurt and Sammy, come upstairs to eat, even in your pajamas. Daddy said to tell you that part.”

Sam responded, “Okay. We’ll be right up.”

“No lollygagging,” she insisted.

“We won’t.”

They went right upstairs and sat down at the table. Kurt and Sam started to eat what was on their plates.

Dwight said, “Mary and I have news to share. We’re moving back home.”

“Really Daddy? When?” Stacey asked.

“In two weeks. You and Stevie will go back to school where you went to Kindergarten.”

Stacey asked, “Where are we going to live?”

“In a house we found, honey,” Mary answered.

“I gave my 2-week notice last week, so I’ll have the week off that we’re moving and I’ll start the new job the next week. Mary’s going to work as a substitute teacher, if she doesn’t find something before school starts.”

“That’s really great, Dad,” Sam said. “I know how much you’ve wanted to move back.”

Stacey said, “So, I get to go back to school with all of my old friends and Sarah and Lisa and Bonnie and Gina?”

“Yes, honey.”

“YAY!! And we get to go to the nice church with nice people who won’t hate Sammy and Kurt, right?”

“Yes.”

Stacey threw her arms around Dwight. “Thank you, Daddy. I wanted to be a good girl and not complain, but I don’t like it where we live now.”

He picked her up and sat her on his lap. “I know. I appreciate you not complaining, but I knew you and Stevie didn’t like it there. That’s why I’ve been trying so hard to get us back to where Nana, Pawpaw, Granny, and Grandpa live.”

Stevie finally spoke. “I can go back to Boy Scouts with Billy, Benji, Robby, and Danny, right?”

“Of course, honey.”
“I’d like that.”

“Robby just outgrew his stuff,” Kenna said. “I know your stuff from before won’t fit. You can have his uniform.”

“Thank you, Aunt Kenna.” He hugged her.

“You’re welcome, honey. I’m so glad you’re moving back.”

“Me too.” He walked over to Mary and sat in her lap. “So, just two weeks?”

“Less, honey. Daddy will work this week and the three of us will pack. He’ll be off next week and we’ll move our stuff to the new house then.”

“We’ll be super good and help you pack, won’t we Stacey?”

“Mmm hmm. I promise to be the best helper ever.”

Mary hugged her and held her close. “You always are, honey.”

She hopped down. “Can we go play now?”

Mary nodded.

All of the kids took off down the stairs.

Mark said, “I’m glad you’re moving back. I know you’ve not enjoyed the last year in Kentucky. And the last half of your time in Ohio was miserable.”

Dwight nodded. “But as much as being in Lima was hard, that was the bank’s fault for their unsavory business practices. I didn’t hate it there, but it’s not a very friendly-to-newcomers place.”

Kurt spoke up. “It’s a not-very friendly-to-a-lot-of-people kind of place.”

They had both finished their breakfast. Sam got up and took Kurt’s dishes with him and put them in the dishwasher.

“We brought something for the kids. You might want to come watch,” Sam said.

Kurt got up and followed him downstairs. Sam rounded up all of the kids while Kurt went to their room to retrieve the surprise.

“Everyone close your eyes,” Sam said.

Kurt unfolded a twin-sized sheet that he found in the closet from Finn’s old bed. He and Sam spread it out on the carpeted floor.

“Okay. Open your eyes,” Sam said.

“Oh, wow, Sammy it’s so cool,” Stacey said. “It’s the biggest Twister mat I’ve ever seen.”

“That’s because Kurt and I made it special so everyone could play at once instead of having to take turns. Who wants to play?”

“Me! Me! Me! Me!”

“Alright. Get ready. We’re going to spin….”
Sunday night came more quickly than anyone wanted it to, but they had enjoyed the full day they had spent in the cabin and in the woods around the area.

Helen, Charlie, Margaret, and Caroline were all staying the night again with Kurt and Sam so they could drive home in the daylight. After dinner and more rounds of Twister and a movie, the six of them said their goodbyes to everyone else and the hugging lasted for quite sometime.

“I looked on the map on Mommy’s phone. Now, we’re going to live even farther away from you.” A few tears streamed down Stacey’s cheeks.

“Daddy told me that they’re getting the internet right away this time. We’ll be able to talk and Skype. It won’t be like when you first moved to Kentucky.”

“Okay. I’ll still miss you.”

“Me too.” He hugged her.

She hugged Kurt next. “Thank you for letting us keep the big Twister. We can play it all together once we move back near everyone. Nana’s taking it to her house for now.”

“You’re welcome.”

Stevie hugged Sam last. “I’m going to miss you too. Maybe you can come visit us in our new house.”

“We’ll see what we can do.”

Stevie was the last one in the car. Dwight and Mary waved as they drove off. They were the last ones to leave.

The eight of them headed back inside the cabin. They sat in the dining room and played card games for a while before they went to bed.

Kurt and Sam said their goodbyes and drove into Gatlinburg to go to the aquarium. The line wasn’t too long, and about ten minutes later, they were inside.

“Let’s see when the feeding times are, so we can plan to see the ones that sound the most fun,” Sam said.

They looked at the list and made their choices. They wandered through the whole building. They loved every bit of it and stayed until 2:00.

When they got back to the car, Kurt said, “Let’s go be very touristy before we leave the area and buy $5 t-shirts.”

After they stopped in Pigeon Forge to get the t-shirts, they went to the knife works shop along the highway to get to Knoxville. Kurt had been there before, so he wanted to stop to show Sam.

“Oh, I don’t remember these. I would have wanted some. Fun money?”

“Definitely.”
They sorted through the practice swords and bought two bokens, two short swords, two katanas, two pirate swords, and two rubber peacekeeper knives. They each also picked out a multi-use folding tool for their bags. They had mini scissors, tweezers, tiny screwdrivers, a nail file, and a bunch of other things.

“You know what?” Kurt asked.

“What?”

“We should pick one type of sword and buy two more for Nick and Jeff for their birthdays so they can play with us.”

“The katanas. There were two more of those. I’ll go grab them. Get in line.”

They carried everything in and got right in the shower and did nothing but shower. Afterwards, they went right to bed.

“I had a lot of fun today, but we’re going to be tired tomorrow. It’s after midnight,” Kurt said.

“Come snuggle me.” Sam extended his arm. “Mmm.” He kissed the top of Kurt’s head. “I had fun too. It was a nice mix of time together and time with my family – our family.”

“I have lots of young cousins-in-law,” Kurt laughed.

“My mom and dad are the oldest in their families and they had me young, so all of the rest of them are around Stevie and Stacey’s age.”

“I can’t imagine already preparing for a baby like your parents were at our age.”

“No me neither.” Sam tipped Kurt’s chin up and kissed him. “I love you. I know we could talk all night, but we have things to do tomorrow.”

“I love you too.” Kurt snuggled in tight.

Kurt knocked on Finn’s door.

“Yeah? Come in.” Finn said, obviously not awake yet.

Kurt opened the door slightly. “You were supposed to be up 10 minutes ago. Parents’ Day brunch, remember?”

“Oh yeah. Crap.” He sat up. “I guess I forgot to set my alarm. I’ll shower super fast and be right down.”

Kurt went back downstairs and helped Sam cook. Finn came rushing in 10 minutes later.

“Sorry. What can I do?”

Kurt said, “Start setting the table.”

Ten minutes later, everything was on the table. The smell of bacon had lured Burt out of their room. He and Carole sat at the table.
“This looks great, boys,” Burt said. “Let’s eat.”

They passed the platters around, filled their plates, and started to eat. Once they had finished, they were given their gifts to open. They opened Finn’s card first.

“Ooh, I love that place,” Carole said.

“Me too. Thanks, Finn.”

Carole opened the small box from Sam and Kurt next. “Now that’s interesting.”

“It’s a key chain that you can fasten around your purse strap and it keeps your keys from ending up lost in the bottom of your bag. You can also fasten around belt loops for when you go out in DC without your bag.”

“That’s really nice. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” they said in unison.

Burt opened his. “Mine’s something similar.”

“The leather piece slides over your belt and use the clasp on the chain to fasten to your keyring. It keeps you from getting pickpocketed or having them fall out of your pocket when you sit down.”

“Very handy. Thanks.”

Finn cleared the table and loaded the dishwasher. Kurt and Sam went down and brought games up. By the time they had everything set up, Trish had arrived for their afternoon of games.

Happy Birthday, dear Nick and Jeff.
Happy Birthday to you!

“We missed you two this weekend. Close your eyes,” Kurt said. “Step forward.” He adjusted them a little so they were side by side. “Put your hands in front of you like you’re going to clap.”

Sam grabbed the swords outside the patio door while Kurt was adjusting them. They put the swords in their hands.

Kurt said, “Open your eyes.”

“No way!” Jeff squealed. “Grown up swords? We can actually fight with these, right?”

“They’re practice swords,” Sam assured him. “We have some too. We can all fight together.”

Nick said, “This is awesome. I think I might just like being an adult if people make cool adult toys like this. Did you get these in Tennessee?”

“We did. There are other types. You can order them online if you want more.”

Jeff gave his mom puppy eyes.

Lynn laughed. “Yes, Jeff, you can add the adult sword toys to your Christmas list.”

“Yes! Let’s go out and fight for a few minutes before we eat the cake.”
Nick followed him out the door and into the yard. They started whacking at each other like they were in the *Princess Bride*. After a couple of minutes, they stopped and went back inside. Everyone followed them back in.

Jeff said, “Ice cream cake time — before they melt. We’ll fight more another time.”

Kurt was the last one to pick up his plate of cake. “These are both really good.”

“Thanks,” Lynn said.

Once everyone finished, Natalie put the leftover cake in their freezer. “So are you two going to tell us what this adventure tomorrow is going to be?”

Jeff said, “Nope, not yet. We’ll tell you tomorrow morning.”

Kurt said, “Well, then, I guess we’ll go get some sleep since we’re leaving at 8:00?”

“We’ll be over at 8:00,” Nick said.

“See you tomorrow morning.” They let themselves out and went back home.

“I wonder what on earth we’re doing tomorrow,” Kurt said. “What interesting things happen on a Tuesday?”

“No idea.”

At 8:00, Jeff knocked on their patio door and Kurt opened and let him in.

“Good morning!” Jeff proclaimed cheerfully.

“Well, you’re even more upbeat than usual,” Kurt remarked.

“I am. It’s not every day that you invite your best friends and parents to elope with you.”

“What? You didn’t even tell us that you were engaged. Sam! We’re going to a wedding!”

Sam came down the hall. “Then I think we’re wearing the wrong clothes.”

“You definitely are. I’m here to chose for you.” Jeff walked down the hall and into their bedroom. “May I?”

Kurt nodded.

Jeff opened their closet. He picked out two blue shirts and two ties with blue and black patterns. “These with black slacks and black shoes.”

“Alright. Give us 15 minutes?”

“Yep. Our moms are getting ready right now. We snagged two of their dresses and dress clothes for our dads yesterday morning after they went to work and we brought them with us.” He took off toward the patio door. “Meet us out by the cars when you’re ready.”

A little before 11:00, they pulled up to the courthouse in Ripley, New York. They went inside and
let the clerk in the office know that they were there for their appointment. They were ushered into the judge’s office. He greeted everyone. Nick and Jeff stood together and faced each other. The other six of them stood across the back of the small room in a row. They had written vows and said them to each other.

After they finished, the judge asked, “Do you Jeff Stirling take Nick Duval to be your husband?”

“I do.” Jeff put a wedding band on Nick’s finger.

“Do you Nick Duval take Jeff Stirling to be your husband?”

“I do.” Nick put Jeff’s ring on him.

“By the authority invested in my by the town of Ripley, New York, I now pronounce you legally married.”

They stepped towards each other and kissed sweetly. They turned and faced the judge. He signed their marriage license and handed Jeff the pen, and then Nick.

“Congratulations.” He shook hands with each of them. “I wish you a long and happy life together.”

“Thank you,” Nick said.

Jeff smiled and said, “That’s the plan.”

Kurt handed his camera to the judge’s secretary and asked her to take a photo of all of them, which she graciously agreed to do. They only had to wait about 10 minutes to get their official marriage certificates. Kurt took a few more photos of the two of them while they waited.

On the way through the small section of Pennsylvania they drove through, they stopped at a restaurant in East End that Nick and Jeff had found online. They each ordered something unique from the eclectic menu.

Lynn said, “So, how did this all come about? We didn’t even know you were officially engaged.”

Nick answered, “Well, after we got the final rejection on our appeal, we made an appointment and we asked what would make a difference. We actually asked why Kurt and Sam’s appeal had been approved, but of course we were told that we couldn’t be given that information. The secretary must have overheard us because when left, she called us over to her desk and gave us a photocopy of the housing guidelines with a small section highlighted that said ‘Single students must live on campus.’”

“So, we realized that despite the fact that Ohio itself doesn’t recognize gay marriages, the university itself does. So, we set out on our plan to get married. We’ve been together forever and you knew we were going to get married once Ohio legalized it. We just didn’t want to see you guys spend so much money on a room for us that we weren’t going to live in. $30,000 is a lot of money. Kurt and Sam would have only had to stay in the dorms for one year because they could have met the requirements of having junior standing next fall, but we’d have to stay for two years.”

Nick said, “You can throw whatever kind reception that you want to, whenever works. We can do it next weekend before school starts or sometime this fall or whatever. We’ve been together forever and we know we’re young and a lot of people won’t approve, but you know us.”

Jerry said, “We do. That’s why we came and supported you. We wanted to be there and we’re glad you included us and didn’t run off on your own.”
Howard said, “I agree with Jerry. We knew this was coming. It’s just a little sooner than we had expected, but I understand your reasoning. And you’re right. The $30,000 can go right into paying the house off as soon as you get an official letter from the school granting you the approval to live off campus.”

Their food arrived quickly. They sampled each other’s choices and everyone was impressed with the food.

Natalie said, “You guys found a great place. You’ll have to see what you can find closer to Kent for special occasions. You did a great job being sneaky wedding planners. We all look smashing.” She struck a pose and made everyone laugh. “We’re really happy for the two of you.”
Chapter 37

After they finished their lunch together, they stopped along Lake Erie and walked around and talked for a while longer before Nick’s and Jeff’s parents drove back to Findlay. Nick, Jeff, Kurt, and Sam returned to Kent, with a few stops along the way. Nick pulled in one of the parking spots and parked. The four of them got out.

“We’ll change and be over in an hour?” Kurt suggested.

“Yeah, that’s fine,” Jeff said. He and Nick continued to walk around to the front of the house to their door.

Sam unlocked the door. “Well, that was a surprise,” Sam said as he closed the door behind them.

“It definitely was.” Kurt headed toward the bedroom. He wrapped his arms around Sam and kissed him once they were in their room. He loosened Sam’s tie and pulled it off over his head and began to unbutton his shirt as he kissed along Sam’s jaw and then down his neck. He moved his hands to unbutton the cuffs on Sam’s sleeves. He slipped the shirt off his shoulders and laid it on the dresser nearby.

“Don’t stop, please,” Sam said, as he reached for the buttons on Kurt’s shirt.

Kurt continued to kiss Sam while undoing the cuffs of his own shirt and unbuttoning from the bottom up to speed up the process of getting his shirt off. He put his on the dresser as well.

“Hey, come on in,” Jeff said, as he opened the patio door. “So, we bought the paints and we know what we want.”

“Alright. Let’s see it,” Sam said.

Jeff and Nick pulled up a page they had bookmarked on Jeff’s laptop and showed Sam.

“So, we’d like something like this one, but just in the shades of blue we bought. And it doesn’t need to be a replica of this. But we’d like it to take up this whole wall like the mural in the photo.” Jeff pointed to the wall that spanned the width of the unit and was half in the dining room, half in the living room.

“We can do that. We’ll need yarn, painter’s tape, a pencil, and a measuring stick.”

“Well, we have the tape and a pencil, but we’ll have to go out to get the other two things.”

“You’re sure this is okay with your dad?” Sam asked. “I don’t want to upset him.”

“He said it’s fine,” Nick said.

“Okay. I’ll sketch it out on a piece of paper after we go back home tonight.”

Jeff came through the kitchen with a box and an envelope. “We’re super late with your birthday presents, but it took us a long time to find them.” He handed Kurt the envelope and gave the box to Sam.
Sam unwrapped his first. “Farscape, the complete series? No way! You found it? Tell me you did not pay $120 for this like it was originally.”

“We didn’t,” Nick said. “We started looking back about a month before your birthday.”

“Thank you! I love this!”

Kurt moved to the counter and opened the envelope. “Oh, my God. You didn’t.”

“Nick overheard you saying something about how some stitch you were doing would be a lot easier if you had some special foot. So, he took a picture of your sewing machine when we were at your house one time in the spring and we started hunting for the feet for it. Those are all the ones that are made for your sewing machine, except a zipper foot and a buttonhole foot which you said you had.”

“There’s an invisible zipper foot. An appliqué foot. A walking foot. An overlock foot. A blind stitch hem foot. An edge stitch foot, a pintuck foot, a binder foot.” There were still a few more in the envelope. “This is too much.”

Nick shook his head. “They weren’t that much. We know you’ll use them for school.”

Kurt nodded. “Thank you. Really. These are perfect.” He wrapped the ones he had taken out back up and put them back in the envelope.

“Are you ready to watch the Warehouse 13 episode we recorded last night? We’re going to order Thai food later. Our treat. Well, our parents’ treat actually.”

They pushed the ottoman against the sofa and four of them got comfortable. Nick pressed play. When it was over, Jeff pulled up the menu from the Thai place on his phone and Nick took his phone out to look up what the dishes were. Once they had all four chosen, Nick called in the order. They played ping pong until the food came.

Nick took the food into the kitchen and they all helped plate it, and then sat down at the table to eat. Everyone enjoyed the different dishes. When they finished, Sam and Kurt cleared the dishes and loaded the dishwasher.

“Thank your parents for dinner for us,” Kurt said.

“Will do,” Jeff responded.

Sam pretend slugged Jeff in the shoulder. “So, how does it feel to be a married man?”

“There is nothing actually different between yesterday and today. I think these last few weeks is probably the first time I’ve ever really seriously contemplated the use of the words ‘social construct’. I’ve loved Nick forever. I haven’t ever considered being with anyone else. I would have never cheated on Nick. I think the difference will be how people treat us. People who are homophobic will not be swayed because we are married. To them, we are sullying the sanctity of marriage. I think some people will respect the level of commitment, but I think a lot of others will look down on us because we’re young and they’ll treat us like we didn’t put enough thought into ‘tying ourselves’ down already. They’ll tease us for only having one sex partner and insist that we’re missing out because of a lack of experience with multiple partners.”

Nick said, “But at the same time, some of the people who consider marriage such an important part of society treat it with such disrespect. There is so much supposed ‘humor’ based around a man being ‘tied down’ or calling his wife a ‘ball and chain’ that it’s just weird to me,” Nick said. “I
absolutely love Jeff and I would never consider him to be a ‘ball and chain’ in any way. I don’t understand men who don’t want to go straight home from work to spend time with their wives. Why did those men marry those women? They don’t respect their wives. So much of what I see is men who wanted someone to replace their mothers and who wanted to have sex. Getting married solved both of those issues for them. They didn’t get married to spend their lives with the person they loved most in the world. They just wanted someone to clean up after them and who couldn’t say no to having sex with them.”

“We’ve never seen that with our own parents,” Jeff said. “Our parents still love each other. But we seemed out of the norm at Dalton. We have parents who cared about us and each other. So many of the other guys never spent time with their parents at all really. And their parents attended social functions together – no personal time with each other apart from the obvious fact that at some point in time they had sex to get their kids. And from the things we heard, a lot of their dads had mistresses or call girls. The first time one of the guys talked about having sex the first time with a prostitute, I was surprised. But I was even more surprised that it had been arranged by his father. Sex lessons, basically. I can’t imagine being raised and told that I would marry whoever was chosen for me, but also taught that I could fulfill my sexual desires elsewhere if I wanted to.”

“We heard it at Dalton after we came out and turned down several threesomes,” Nick said. “You’ll never know unless you give it a try.’ Or ‘It’ll be fun. Loosen up. Have some fun. No strings.’ We’re not opposed to other people doing whatever they want as long as all parties are consenting and I’m sure we’ll continue to hear similar things. I’m happy with Jeff. I don’t need to have sex with some peer-accepted number of guys before I know I’m happy. And I obviously didn’t marry Jeff just so we could have sex that’s deemed socially acceptable.”

They other three laughed.

Kurt said, “Sam and I haven’t dealt with any of that yet. I was the only out gay guy, and I was publicly targeted for being gay. And after Sam was outed, he didn’t get propositioned. He gotbullied like I had been. After you two came out, guys propositioned the two of you and teased you about being monogamous, whereas we were still just shunned socially or our monogamous gayness was excluded as a conversation topic. I can see people saying things like that to Sam.” He changed the subject abruptly. “It’s hard to believe that classes start two weeks from yesterday.”

Nick asked, “Did you two finish that book we were assigned to read over the summer yet?”

Kurt answered, “We found a used audio version online. We’re going to start listening to it tomorrow.”

“We’re not very far into it, but it’s interesting,” Jeff said.

“Good,” Sam said. “Interesting is always a good start. I think we’ll head back next door and I’ll get started on a drawing for the wall since we’re going out early tomorrow? When we’re out tomorrow you can get the yarn and a measuring stick, and then we can get started. I have some projects I’m working for our place that I’m working on too.”

Kurt stepped forward and hugged Jeff and then Nick. “Congratulations on getting married. We’re happy for you.”

Sam hugged each of them as well.

Kurt stopped in front of the patio door. “Thanks again for the sewing machine feet. They’re amazing.”
“You’re welcome,” Nick said.

“I’m looking forward to rewatching Farscape,” Sam said. I haven’t seen it in ages.”

“We’ll watch it with you, if that’s okay with you. We’ve never seen it.”

“Neither has Kurt. It’ll be fun. We can talk about when tomorrow. See ya.” Sam followed Kurt out the door. Jeff closed it behind them.

“Let’s tackle our laundry and getting the curtains I made for the end of the hallway put up. I’d rather use the daylight tomorrow to do fun projects than do the less fun stuff like washing and folding clothes.” Kurt said, as he locked the door and pulled the curtains shut.

Sam said, “Works for me, but at the end of the chores, I want a bubble bath with you.”

Kurt walked across the room and shut the living room curtains as well. “I accept your terms.” He walked back to where Sam was standing in the open space between the living room and dining room and put his hands on Sam’s shoulders. He slid them up his neck, and then to Sam’s jaw. He stepped closer and kissed him. He slid his hands back down and took Sam’s hands. He turned and put Sam’s hands on his hips and started to hum and started to dance, doing the conga back to their room. Once he got there, he continued to hum and sway his hips while he pulled their laundry baskets out.

“You know that all the silliness does is make me want to toss you into the bed and tickle and kiss you, right?”

“We put a load in, and then you can tickle and kiss me.”

Sam grabbed all of the dark wash and dries and tossed them into the washer and started it.

“That was fast.”

“Motivation is a key factor in completing tasks in a timely fashion.” He put the laundry baskets on the floor and pushed Kurt onto his back on the bed. He slipped his hands under Kurt’s shirt and started to tickle him, just enough to get him to laugh, and then he kissed him. He sat right back up on his knees.

“That’s it?”

Sam leaned forward, pushing Kurt’s t-shirt up simultaneously and started to nip and kiss along his ribs, causing Kurt to start to flail around a little and making him laugh really hard. He changed to just kissing, and then changed again to licking along his ribs, which caused Kurt to start to laugh again.

During the last load of clothes they did, they attached the side support pieces to the hallway wall and put the 4cm oak dowel they bought on their way back earlier that afternoon up. Sam helped Kurt iron the curtains and hang them.

“What do you think?”

“I think it looks a lot more neat than having our clothes hanging to dry where people could see
them, and that space was completely unused and not really suitable for much of anything other than a bookcase or storage shelf. So, I think it’s a good use of space.”

Kurt went in the living room and brought back the ironing board and the iron to put them away.

“Bath time.” He went in the bathroom and began to run the water. Kurt followed him in after he had finished what he was doing.

“Front or back?” Sam asked.

“Mmm. Back. You were in the back the last time.”

“M’kay. Get in then.”

Kurt got in and Sam followed. Kurt ran his hands along Sam’s arms caressing him. “I was thinking.”

Sam chuckled. “Sorry. I’m not making fun of you. I promise.”

“I know. And I am aware of how often I start a conversation by saying, ‘I was thinking.’ It’s probably most of the time. You told me that thinking so much is sexy.”

“It is. And it shows me how much you love me and how hard you work at figuring things out.” He drew a heart right above Kurt’s knee. “What were you thinking about?”

“We, what Jeff said, what Nick said, classes starting – lots of stuff.”

Sam ran his hands along Kurt’s thighs, enjoying being close to Kurt and giving him time to share his thoughts.

“So far, everyone I’ve known has either known or found out about the bullying. But I don’t want to be that ‘kid that was bullied’ anymore. I just want to be Kurt Hummel-Evans. I don’t know exactly how to explain my thoughts. I want to be real and authentic and to be myself. I want to live my life on my own terms as much as possible. I don’t want to deny the past or try to pretend that it didn’t exist because what happened to me affected me and changed me. And after you came out, it affected you too. But in a lot of ways, it really doesn’t anymore. We’re here. We live together in our own place. We love each other. We’re married. We’re going to college. No one here knows our story except Nick and Jeff. And even they don’t know everything.” He placed kisses along Sam’s shoulder.

“You just want to move on.”

“I do. I love you so much and I love being here and having this life with you. This is amazing. I’m really hoping that the way we were treated in Lima never becomes part of our lives again. And maybe it’s wrong, but I feel like if we talk about it with people, it will stay with us and have a place in our present.”

“I see what you mean.”

“I don’t want to deny you the right to talk about that if you want to. I’m not asking you to keep any of your own past a secret. I just don’t want to talk about my past to new people. Maybe if anyone we meet actually becomes a close friend, I’ll feel differently. I just want to not be looked at with pity or as a potential target.”

“How about this? We’ll consider the topic of high school one that we discuss only the basics of.
Sports we played, clubs we were in – just the basics. Anything else, we’ll consider to be topics that only get discussed once we’ve decided that someone we’ve met has reached friend level instead of just classmate or acquaintance.”

“And once someone reaches the friend level, you and I can talk about whether we want to share anything personal from our past with whoever it is.”

“Seems reasonable to me,” Sam stated.

“I think I’m just so used to the overbearingly nosy nature of the Glee Club that I’m rebelling against that for my future life. I want to be in control of what I share and who I share it with.”

“I hear you on that. I remember standing there being accused of sleeping with you and Quinn. For a group who considered themselves to be like a family, it was a pretty dysfunctional family.”

“We were kids when Glee started. We grew up, but some better adult guidance would have helped a lot more.”

“So, basically, you want people to stick to the ‘soup questions’?”

“Exactly, but I know they won’t. I think all of this is just making me really consider how to answer the ‘not soup questions’ with ‘soup question’ answers. We really don’t know anything about anyone. We don’t know who is secretly like JBI and who is actually trustworthy. I don’t want to go back to my ice bitch mode where I just act like everyone is beneath me and unworthy of my time, but I don’t want to reveal information to people who may not keep it to themselves.”

“I think that’s a legitimate issue. You want to be a performer and I want to be an artist of some sort. If either one of us ever achieves success those careers, we could become public figures. And with the age of instant sharing where everyone around the world can see and share information, we do have to be careful. Texting people things isn’t private when they can just take a screenshot of what is written and post it to Facebook or wherever in an instant.”

“And we dealt with the press for a while at home, but we don’t honestly know who might try to sell me out for a few bucks to a tabloid for saying or doing something embarrassing. There’s more at stake than just regular freshman anxiety about meeting new people. I know I’m not the president’s kid or anything, but still. We just have to find that line between coming off as snobby and protecting our own interests. I need to be somehow outgoing and friendly while maintaining my emotional distance from people until I know them better, which of course will be hard if they are also attempting to retain their emotional distance.”

“True. I see why this topic has caused you to spend a lot of time thinking about it.” He turned a little and turned his head and tipped it back so that he could kiss Kurt.

“Think about the two of us. That day at Dalton could have gone at least a couple of other ways. Your choice that day completely altered the course of your life. You could have handed the pizzas over, taken the money, and walked away as if we didn’t know each other at all. You could have done the same, except acknowledged that we knew each other. And when I asked why you were delivering pizzas in Westerville, you could have made up a lie about how the Westerville store was so short-handed that they called the Lima store for back-up for the weekend. I would have found that odd, but lots of things in life are odd and I would have just shrugged it off. You could have just been honest about the part about your dad losing his job and then refused to ask your parents about me telling my dad. And that would have been that. I wouldn’t have told him without your permission. But instead, you came back and not only did you tell me about what was going on, you also told me that you liked me and asked me out. That changed the course of both of our lives
when I said ‘yes’ and your parents agreed to let my dad, and then Hiram help.”

“I am really glad I didn’t do those other things, which did actually cross my mind. I knew there was a slim chance I’d see you that night I went to deliver the pizzas. I thought about what to do. I had convinced myself not to say anything, like I had been doing at school. But when I came back to see you, once we were alone, I just changed my mind at the last minute.”

“In another reality you didn’t tell me and no one helped your family. I left Dalton not long after that to keep my dad from taking out a loan to keep me there because I didn’t know about the advocate, but I stayed long enough for Blaine’s Regionals duet and surprise kiss to have wooed me. He came to McKinley, but didn’t work to graduate early because I didn’t stick around Dalton long enough to inspire anyone to be themselves and Nick and Jeff stayed in the closet and didn’t attempt to graduate early Blaine didn’t have anyone to emulate. Sebastian came to Dalton, met Blaine, and chased him. Neither of us ever put two and two together to realize who he was. Let’s see. I wouldn’t have been at Dalton for that College and Career seminar and I wouldn’t have looked into what I needed to. I’d be living with Rachel in New York with Blaine as my boyfriend still at McKinley.”

“I don’t like that version. What I am doing?”

“Living in Kentucky? Maybe you came back to Ohio when you hated it there so much. Maybe you’re ‘besties’ with Blaine while you repeat your senior year at McKinley.”

“In what kind of weird reality would I be ‘besties’ with Blaine?”

“I don’t know. Maybe the kind where cubes fly through space at incomprehensible speed, and then just stop on a dime?”

“Hmm.” He ticked Kurt. “I don’t like that ‘reality’.”

“Maybe you date Brittany and marry her instead.”

“Now, you’re just asking to be tickled.” He kissed Kurt.

“You came just in time to prevent the final stages of my assimilation. And that action changed the space time continuum.”

Sam chuckled. He had turned even more and was still reclined against Kurt’s arm and partially against his chest, allowing him to kiss Kurt easily from the position he was in. “I’m glad. You’re so much fun and totally unique and interesting. The collective didn’t value your uniqueness. Their loss was my gain.” He kissed Kurt. “Definitely my gain.”

“Sweet talker.”

“Just telling it like I see it.”

“I need to figure out a way to get in contact with Trent. With Nick and Jeff gone, and quite a few of the Warblers graduating, I feel bad for him there alone trying to swim upstream.”

“Sure.” He kissed Kurt again. “Are you ready to rinse off and shower quickly? The water’s starting to get a little chilly.”

“Sure.”
Kurt snuggled up behind Sam as the big spoon. He slipped his hand under Sam’s pillow and Sam bent his elbow and laid his hand in Kurt’s. “So, what’s the plan for the rest of this week?” He kissed the back of Sam’s neck. “We’ve caught up on our chores. I know that grocery shopping is the priority tomorrow morning. Nick and Jeff are going with us. We’ll stop and get the yarn and a measuring stick.”

“Well, we have the book to read. And I want to finish both paintings and the illuminated letters and get them hung up.” He paused for a minute, thinking. “Oh, I know. We need to order those shelf hook things we looked up online so that we can hang the swords up that we bought.”

“Going to Ikea to get them would be fun, but it’s too long of a drive just to get those shelf hooks. We just need to order them online. We need to get working on Finn’s and Trish’s birthday present. And the Bluetooth speaker that we didn’t get yet. I miss dancing with you.”

“Alright, we’ll get one at Costco if they have them. And another pack of wood hangers. I can’t think of anything else.”

“The menu.”

Sam sighed. “You’re right. We didn’t work on a menu. Let’s try to sleep now so we can make one for at least a week when we get up.”

Kurt flattened his hand out over Sam’s heart. “Now our college adventures begin. We’re here. No running back to Lima to work during the week.” He took a deep breath and let it out.

Sam altered his voice to sound robotic, like one of the computer voices in a sci fi movie. “Life Phase Three has begun. This is not a simulation. I repeat. This is not a simulation.”

Kurt broke out laughing. “You have to stop.”

“Why?”

“Well, not stop permanently, but just for now.”

“Why?” he teased.

“Because.”

He went back to his computerized voice. “Inadequate explanation. Please clarify and restate answer.”

Kurt laughed again. “Because because.”

“Repetition of the inadequate explanation does not make it adequate,” he continued with the automated computer voice.

“I’m sure you know the reason. Your ability to think up funny things to say or to remember lines from movies and do the appropriate voices to go along with it is a big turn on and we’re trying to go to sleep. Or at least we were until you got me laughing and thinking about how adorable and sexy you are.”

Sam dropped the silliness. “You think my impressions are sexy?”

“I thought you already knew that. I’ve not really kept it a secret how attracted I am to you. And you’re really the only person that has ever really been able to make me genuinely laugh. You
remember the first weekend we were together.”

“You said that I had made you laugh more in three days than you had in three months, I believe.”

“The three months was just an arbitrary comparison. I could have said three years just as easily. I honestly don’t remember laughing much ever. You brought joy back into my life. I love your impressions. They’re this amazing and fun part of you that just strikes my funny bone, I guess. They also make me want to kiss you.”

“I see. Sebastian makes you laugh, so does Jeff.”

“In certain situations, Jeff can. Sebastian can do it on his own as well, but he had been gone for most of my life.”

“The two of you might have been like Nick and Jeff if he hadn’t moved away.”

“I guess it’s possible? But I’ve never thought about him that way.”

“You were kids when he left, so that makes sense. He wasn’t around by the time you might have seen him differently.”

“Are you feeling like you’re somehow not good enough for me or something? Turn over.” Kurt scooted back to give him room. “That reminds me that I want to get those tiny eye hooks so we can get the twinkle lights hung back up.” He put his hand on the side of Sam’s face and ran his thumb along his cheek. “I am in love with you Samuel Robert Hummel-Evans.” He scooted forward and kissed Sam. “I love you. You’re my best friend, the person who knows the most about me in the whole world. You light up my world. You brought light back into my world and you brighten everything. Just knowing you’re nearby makes me smile. And I’m not sure what’s causing the insecurity, but I promise to do a better job of saying how you make me feel because I never want you to wonder.” He pressed closer and kissed Sam again. He ran his hand through Sam’s hair as he continued to talk. “If I had to pick one person in the world to get sent on some 10-year space journey with, it would be you. I could happily spend the rest of my life creating things with you and working on projects while you work on your own projects nearby.”

“I feel the same way about you. I’m not feeling insecure about the two of us.”

“Okay. You’re the one who will get the pity looks and the eye glares from the girls who are aggravated that you’re not into them, like you mentioned happening after The Muckraker incident.”

“That’s why you changed the subject so quickly after dinner. You think I settled for you?”

“Whether you did or didn’t, people will wonder what I have on you or what you’re getting out of it besides me. I’m not a ‘catch’. I have come to accept that you find me attractive, which I’m glad about. So, no, I don’t actually think that YOU feel like you’ve settled for me, but I think that other people will see it differently.”

“I honestly haven’t been thinking about that at all because it never occurred to me to think about because I think you’re gorgeous.”

“What have you been thinking about then?”

“What if I go to class and everyone is better than me and the university realizes that they made a mistake giving me a scholarship and I get told not to come back? What if the other art students actually laugh at my stuff? What if the note taker I get is terrible?”
“Sweetie, if any of those things happen, we’ll figure out what to do instead. You talked about all of this before we decided to come here. It’s okay to be scared and nervous. I am too. We have the opportunity to try to give our career dreams a chance. If they don’t work out, they don’t. If I never get any parts, if you never sell another piece of art, and if I end up going back to working as a mechanic and you get a job being a barista or whatever, we can still be happy and enjoy our lives together. I can still do tailoring and costume work on my own and you can still paint and create other types of artwork. We’re young. We’re both nervous about college, but I’m not doubting that I want to do all of this with you – not at all. Are you?”

“No. I don’t want you to think that I doubt our bond because I don’t. I’m not worried that you’ll find someone else, not because you aren’t absolutely amazing and gorgeous, but because I trust you. You tell me that you love me and that I am enough. I believe you because I trust you.”

“And I trust you. You are enough, more than enough.” Kurt scooted ever closer and used one of Sam’s octopus snuggle moves and wrapped himself around Sam. “You’re it, sweetie. You’re mine and I’m yours. The two of us together for as long as possible.”

“Sounds perfect. I like your snuggle-octopus idea.” He wrapped his hand around the back of Kurt’s neck and pressed his lips gently to Kurt’s.

“So, show me already, Mr. Melodramatic,” Sebastian said, teasing Kurt.

“Hush, you. You two are the first to get to see the full reveal. You should feel honored.”

“I’m honored, honorifically honored. Now, get on with it. I’ve been waiting MONTHS for my tour.”

Kurt rolled his eyes, and then turned flipped the video feed to the rear-facing camera on his phone. “So, as you come in the front door, we have this alcove with a nice, big coat closet. Sam helped him out by opening the closet doors, and then closing them back. Kurt took a couple of steps and panned the room, slowly turning in a circle.

Sam said, “And here we have the living room.”

“I like the painting over the couch,” Dylan said. “Nice job, Sam.”

“Thanks.”

“Scoot closer to those illuminated letters over the piano,” Dylan urged Kurt. “Which one of you did those?”

“We worked on them together,” Kurt answered.

“I like those a lot,” Dylan said.

“Thanks,” Kurt replied. He turned to his left. “And this is the dining room and kitchen. Sebastian said, “Our painting collage from your wedding turned out fun to look at. Certainly not high art, but entertaining.”

“That’s why we love it so much,” Kurt said. He continued to pan to the left.

“Nice kitchen,” Sebastian said. “It has a lot of countertop and storage space.”
“We like it,” Sam said. He moved through the kitchen into the small hallway. “Laundry closet.” He opened it briefly. “Bathroom.” He waggled his eyebrows and let Kurt step inside in front of him.


“We know,” Kurt said. “That was Nick’s doing. He persuaded his dad to install them instead of regular bathtubs.” He panned the room slowly enough that everything could be seen.


Kurt exited the bathroom and went into the study. He panned the room. “Our study.”

“So, that’s where you put the paintings you three did at the museum that day,” Dylan said.

“It is.”

“And your Wicked poster,” Sebastian noticed.

“Yep. And our photo collages from New York and our other trips.”

“That’s a nice easel,” Dylan said. “I don’t remember seeing it before.”

“Kurt got it for me when we moved our furniture over here. I love it.”

Kurt turned and went back out into the alcove and into their bedroom. He turned slowly once again.

“I like the paintings in there as well. You had that one in your bedroom in Lima,” Dylan said.

“We did,” Kurt agreed.

Sam said, “That’s the whole place.”

He and Kurt went back to the living room and sat down next to each other on the sofa.

“I like the set up,” Sebastian said. “It’s a lot bigger than our flat here. If you put the kitchen where your piano is and imagine two bedrooms where your dining room and kitchen are, that’s about how big this place is.” He switched the camera on his phone and gave them a really brief tour of the place.

“We have this 4-day orientation slash new student event starting tomorrow. And classes start Monday,” Kurt said.

“We start Monday as well,” Dylan said.

Sebastian said, “I have a surprise for the two of you.”

“What?” Kurt asked.

“I wanted to keep it a surprise, but Uncle Burt didn’t think that would be a good idea, so I’m going to tell you.”

“Okay…”

“You’re spending winter break with us here in Paris.”
Kurt looked confused. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that my maman, my dad, and your parents are going in on buying tickets for the two of you to come here and spend the four weeks of your winter break here with us in Paris.”

“No way,” Kurt said.

“No way? You don’t want to come?” Sebastian looked confused.

“Of course, I want to come. I definitely want to come. I just didn’t think it would be possible to do something like that for a long time.”

“Well, the plane tickets aren’t that expensive. The expensive part about a month-long stay would be the accommodations, which will be at no expense to you since you can stay with us.”

Kurt and Sam just stared at the phone screen.

“Are you two speechless or did our connection freeze up?”

“We’re here,” Sam said. “We’re just in shock.”

“Thank you,” Kurt finally said. “It’s an amazing surprise.”

“And the other part is that Dylan and I will be staying with my dad for the month of July.”

“That will be fun.”

“I’m counting on the Hummel Travel Agency to plan some adventures for the four, or six, or eight of us.”

“Sorry, that agency closed down.”

Sebastian looked at Kurt, completely confused.

“The Hummel-Evans Travel Agency will be pleased to take your requests, though.”

“Of course,” he smirked. “Yes, of course. How silly of me.” He rolled his eyes and laughed.

“So, is the Hummel-Evans Agency in charge of the planning for winter break?”

Happy birthday, dear Finn.

Happy birthday to you.

Finn blew out the candles on his cake. Kurt grabbed a knife and started slicing the mint chocolate chip ice cream cake into slices and plating them. Trish picked the pieces up and handed them out, starting with Finn.

After everyone had finished eating, Finn opened his gifts. His card from Burt and Carole had a gift card to the University of Toledo bookstore. He opened Kurt and Sam’s gift next. He pulled a solid medium gray sweatshirt with a blue logo out of the gift bag. He looked it for a second before it dawned on him what it was.

“That’s cool. That’s on a bunch of the stuff in Firefly.”
“It is. This way you can geek out secretly. Only real Firefly fans will get the reference,” Sam said.

“Thanks. It’s cool.”

Kurt pushed a bag towards Trish.

“It’s not my birthday.”

“I know,” Kurt said. “It’s not Finn’s either. His was a week ago and yours is in less than three weeks.”

She pulled out a medium blue hoodie and laughed when she opened it up. “I love it. It’s shiny.”

Carole said, “Trish is definitely shiny.”

Burt and Aunt Eunice looked confused.

“It’s from the Firefly TV series too. It’s the popular word for something being awesome or really cool,” Sam supplied.

Trish laughed and smiled. “Thanks, you two.”

Kurt and Sam said, “You’re welcome.”

They put in a blow-’em-up action movie that didn’t interest Kurt. He got Carole to go for a walk with him instead.

“Do you know why Trish doesn’t celebrate her birthday?” Kurt asked.

“I don’t.”

“She told all of us one of the times we all slept over at Nick’s before Dylan and Sebastian left. She didn’t say not to tell anyone, but she also didn’t say to feel free to tell everyone. So, I’m going to tell you because I want you and Dad and Finn to make a big deal of her birthday and how glad you are that she’s part of your lives without making reference to anything I’m going to tell you.”

“Alright. I can do that. I won’t tell Burt until after her birthday, if he even asks. That way it will make sense, but it won’t be awkward at the time.”

Kurt nodded. “You know that she’s a lot younger than her two brothers and you’ve heard her say that they ignore her.”

“Yeah. I found it odd, but people have weird family issues.”

“Well, her mom had a lot of female trouble after her second brother was born, but she was still young enough to have another child. And despite her telling more than one doctor that she wanted a hysterectomy, she was denied based on the fact that she might still want another child some time, which she did in some ways because she loved kids, but her concerns were ignored. She couldn’t take hormonal birth control, and anyway, she ended up pregnant with Trish when her brothers were like 12 and 14.”

“Okay.”

“He mom ended up with pre-eclampsia, on top of the already difficult pregnancy.”
“Oh, dear.”

“She ended up having seizures and then a stroke after Trish was born. I guess her brothers were at an age between being able to understand that the doctors did what they could and being able to accept the outcome. Their mom died the same day Trish was born. And they just can’t deal with the fact that they lost their mom over a baby. They say that their mom should have had an abortion and insisted on getting the hysterectomy. Trish’s existence robbed them of their mother. Before she was old enough to go to school, they moved out.”

“That’s terrible. It’s not her fault her mother died.”

“I know. And she knows, but it doesn’t change the way her brothers act. You’ve met her dad and he obviously he loves her.”

They ended up in the stables. They walked along and continued to talk to each other and the horses, as they stopped at each stall and stroked any of the horses that came and put their heads out.

“Sorry, I don’t have any treats, Rose,” Kurt said. “But you’re a sweet horse,” he said, as he ran his hand along her face the way she liked.

“You’d think they would have grown up and stopped acting that way towards her.”

“You’d think. But they dislike their dad as well. They blame him for not standing up to the doctors and insisting on the hysterectomy or insisting on an abortion. They only visit a couple of times a year for a short period of time. I can’t imagine being her dad and having to explain that story to her once she was old enough to understand.”

“That’s really sad.”

“It is, but a lot of families are screwed up like you said. Santana’s grandma never came around as far as I know. Dave hasn’t resolved things with his mom. I came close to letting myself be pushed away by Dad. I had the advantage of knowing that he loved me, but he still operated under some messed up ideas.”

“He realized the error of his previous way of thinking and changed.”

“He did, but if I hadn’t called him out on it, things could have been different. Rather than him opening his mind to the idea of our home being my refuge and safe place from the hatred in Lima, he could have stuck with his ‘inappropriate’ stand and held onto his ‘not in my house’ line of thinking. That would have changed absolutely everything. He was very ‘out of sight, out of mind’ about all of it. It was okay that I was gay, but he didn’t want to hear about it or know anything about it. Sort of like the two of us are about Finn’s fondness for Call of Duty – he can be as into as he wants to be, but we don’t want to learn anything about it or watch him play it or listen to him talk about it.”

Carole laughed.

“Sam and I are really happy together and I don’t know how all of that would have played out if he had kept the rules he had previous set down. I guess Sam would have gone to Kentucky with his family. I don’t want to think about it. He’s perfect for me. And no I’m not deluded into thinking he’s perfect. No one’s perfect. But he and I fit together and he just gets me. I have a favor to ask you.”

“What?”
“Is there a chance that you can send me a calendar for each month that shows when you and Dad will be in Lima? I’m not sure whether we’ll have much time to come for weekend visits or not. With only just finishing the first week of classes, we don’t really have a good feel for how much time we’ll have to spend on schoolwork. I had to audition for the fall play and the fall musical. Hopefully, I will get a role in one or the other and if not, I’ll be working on the costuming for them. I might be doing both. We’re both meeting with our advisors this next week to make our graduation plans and go over all of the graduation requirements for our degrees and fill in all of the ones that we’ve already fulfilled with the classes we took at OSU Lima. Both of us are already taking an extra class in our major because we didn’t need to take English this semester. We’ve been looking through the course catalog and the requirements for different majors within our degree programs. We’re trying to figure out whether graduating a year early or double majoring is a better idea. Right now, it seems like a double major would be a better idea because it might give us a better chance at finding work once we graduate.”

“That seems like the best course of action to me too, but seeing the advisor is a good idea because they’ll know all of the ins and outs of the way the system works. I did my fair share of scouring the course catalog for courses that could fulfill more than one requirement, especially when both requirements were for things I did not enjoy.”

Kurt nodded. “I think Sam and I already took all of the courses that were weren’t particularly interesting last year. Our whole situation is unusual, so we asked for appointments as soon as we were able to make them. I’ll find out about whether I got a role in either production when we go back to school on Tuesday. The play is in October and the musical is in November, which makes sense because there’s so much more to rehearse for a musical. The great irony of is that we’re doing The Rocky Horror Picture Show.”

Carole laughed. “I remember that fiasco. Mr. Schuester had a few screws loose thinking that production was ever going to be allowed.”

“Yeah. I feel especially bad for Artie and Tina. They were original members of the group and more than likely there won’t be a Glee Club this year. I guess they could still do a musical or a play if they could get a faculty member to sponsor it and could find enough people willing to be in it.”

“Burt is still working to get more arts funding, but I did finally get a PTA started over the summer, even though I’m not a parent of a child in the school anymore. Getting it going was ridiculously hard. Surprisingly, my strongest support for getting it started has been Mrs. Adams.”

“Azimio graduated from North Lima.”

“She has nieces and nephews who go to and will go to McKinley. She’s still angry that no one told her what a terror Azimio was when he was young enough that she would have had an easier time getting him help. She insists that he behaved in other situations.”

“I see. I think that’s actually more terrifying.”

“Strando got his football scholarship. He’s heading to Michigan State. Azimio was recruited by Ohio State, so he’s in Columbus. The other two I haven’t heard anything about.”

Kurt was glad to know that Dave had accepted the scholarship offer to Purdue and had already moved to West Lafayette, Indiana as soon as his OSU classes had finished in June. “They were followers, not leaders. Hopefully, they mind their own business from now on.”

They left the stable and made their way back towards the house as they continued to talk.
Nearly four weeks later, Kurt, Sam, Nick, and Jeff met up with Finn and Trish and their two friends in the lobby of the hotel they were staying in for Comic Con. They picked up their keycards and went to their rooms. Finn and Trish followed Kurt next door, leaving Nick, and Jeff with Renee and Max.

Kurt handed Trish the jumpsuit he had made for her. “Make sure I don’t need to alter it somehow.”

She took it from him and headed into the bathroom. While she was gone, Sam gave Finn his brown ringer tee.

“Oh, wow. It looks just like Jayne’s. You did a great job on the design on the shirt.”

“Thanks,” Sam said.

Kurt turned back around from getting something out of his bag and held it out to Finn.

“No way! Did you knit that or whatever?”

“I did.”

“That is awesome!”

“What’s awesome?” Trish asked.

Finn put the hat on.

“Oh, my God. The orange hat is perfect. The jumpsuit fits perfectly. And I’m assuming Sam is the one that made it look like I’ve been fixing spaceship engines with the fake dirt and oil stains?”

“That was me, yes.”

“Well, we’re going to look amazing,” she said, as she closed the door and put her regular clothes back on.

“So, how did you meet Renee and Max?”

“It was the hoodies you gave us for our birthdays,” Finn said. “Me and Trish were sitting in the cafeteria eating and they walked up and sat down across from us and commented on them.”

“Cool,” Sam said.

“They already have their own complete Wash and Zoe costumes,” Trish said, as she hung her jumpsuit back up. “The six of us are going to look awesome.”

The next weekend, Kurt finished his all-black backstage ensemble with a pair of solid black dance shoes. “It’s hard to believe the play is opening tonight,” Kurt said.

“I hope it goes smoothly.”

“Me too.”

“I love you too.” He squeezed him gently. He let go and opened the front door. He let Kurt step out, and then closed and locked the door behind them. He took Kurt’s hand as they walked to his truck.

“It was disappointing not getting a role in the play at first, but working on the costumes has been fun and working backstage during the show has taught me a lot. Plus, the rehearsals for *Rocky Horror* on top of the rehearsals for *Big Love* wouldn’t have left me time to do the costumes.”

“Which I am looking forward to seeing when I go see the play next week.” He looked at Kurt and winked. “I mean the six of us DID win the group cosplay contest at Comic Con. I bet whatever you’ve worked on for the show is amazing.”

“Sweet talker.” Kurt smiled at Sam and slid to the center from the driver’s side and kissed Sam once he was in the driver’s seat. He put his hand on Sam’s thigh as they backed out and headed to the auditorium.

When they pulled up, Sam said, “I’ll be here waiting for you five minutes after you call.”

“I’m sorry to have you drive me when we live so close.”

“You know I don’t mind. I’d rather know you got here safe than having you walking here in the dark, well almost dark on the way here and completely pitch dark on the way back. That’s one thing we didn’t take into consideration living off campus was the lack of street lights in certain areas and how early it would get dark in the winter. But it’s fine. I don’t mind at all. And it if starts being a problem, we’ll just get a parking sticker so you can park on campus.”

Kurt turned towards him and kissed him one last time before he slid out the passenger side. He waved as he walked toward the auditorium doors.

The day before Halloween, Sam opened the front door to find Kurt’s third customer of the afternoon standing there.

“I’m Andrew. I’m here to see Kurt.”

“Come on in. I’m Sam.” He shut the door and called out, “Kurt, Andrew’s here.”

Kurt came around the corner into the living room. “Right this way.” Kurt led him down to the study. “It’s hanging on a hook on the back of the door. Go ahead and put it on. Open the door when you’re done so I can see if there’s anything that needs altered.”

“Got it.”

Kurt stood in the hallway and waited. Andrew opened the door a few minutes later.

“I think it’s just right. Nothing to fix.” He turned around in place, allowing Kurt to see the whole pirate costume.

“Can I photograph you in it? For my portfolio? I’ll blur your face since the hat is part of the outfit.”

“Um, sure. You won’t put my name or anything?”
“Nope. I just want to keep a photographic record to show people costumes I’ve made.”

“Then, it’s fine.”

Kurt stepped inside the room, closed the door and photographed him from a couple of angles with him standing in front of the closet, and then left him in the room to put his clothes back on. Andrew opened the door again a few minutes later.

“Thanks for this. It’s really fantastic.” He handed Kurt an envelope.

Kurt double-checked the amount. “You’re welcome. Give me just a second.” Kurt turned around and grabbed a disposable garment bag, like the kind from the dry cleaners, and put it over the top of the costume. “I hope you have a great time wearing it.” He led Andrew back into the living room where Sam was sitting, studying something. He ushered Andrew out and closed and locked the door behind him. “He was the last one. $500 isn’t bad. It will give us more spending money in Paris.”

Sam smiled. “I can’t believe you managed to fit making those three outfits into your schedule in a week.” He patted the sofa.

Kurt sat down next to him and leaned into him. “Me neither really, but I need to build my portfolio of projects and Halloween is the best time of year because people actually WANT to buy expensive costumes. I just need to figure out a better way to do it besides staying up all weekend before Halloween. I’ll do a better job of time management next October. I thought I’d get more people earlier in the month, but now I know better. Two in a little over three weeks, and then three people in the last week. At least some of those new sewing machine feet Nick and Jeff got me saved me time.”

“Good. I know you have some regular schoolwork to do. Would a nap help or make things worse?”

“I’m honestly not sure. I’ll try to stay awake and get it done before we eat. Maybe we can just shower early and go to bed?”

“Sounds like a good plan to me. You have a long day tomorrow and I can do my stuff tomorrow morning.”

Wednesday afternoon, the Rocky Horror cast had their dress rehearsal. When it was over, they were escorted to the campus Halloween event as the guest stars of the Halloween photo booth, which had been stocked with some inexpensive additions to fit in with the Rocky Horror theme of the party.

Kurt was asked to pose with a lot of people throughout the one-hour photo session. When the hour was almost up, Sam stopped by again. This time he slipped the gold lamé shorts on over his jeans and slipped his hoodie off and posed with Kurt as Rocky. They got quite a few wolf whistles from other students standing around in the area. Kurt turned and kissed Sam, which the photographer caught. Kurt just laughed and shook his head, while rolling his eyes.

Sam put his hoodie back on and put the shorts back in the costume box. He took Kurt’s hand and led him out of the photo area to go back to the theatre to change with the rest of the cast.

“Well, that was a surprise,” Kurt said when they got back to the costuming area. “It’s been a while since I’ve seen you in a Rocky costume. You’re much sexier now.”
“Why’s that? I’m pretty sure my abs looked better back then.” He ran his hand down his torso. “I’m getting out of shape.”

Kurt took his wig off and removed his Riff Raff make up. He stood back up and kissed Sam before he started to hang up the pieces to his costume. “Well, you’re much sexier now because back then in my mind you were off-limits, and now you’re all mine.” Kurt ran his hand down Sam’s chest and leaned forward. “So sexy,” he said very quietly, directly into Sam’s ear.

“Need any help getting that costume hung up?” Sam asked, winking at Kurt.

After their quick shower, Kurt wrapped his towel around his waist, put the casserole that Sam had prepped earlier into the oven, and quickly went back to rejoin Sam in the bathroom. The tub was nearly ready for them to soak in. Sam got in and Kurt followed him. When there was enough water, Kurt leaned up and turned the faucet off. He got comfortable again, lying back against Sam’s chest.

He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Two days. The dress rehearsal went well this afternoon. One more rehearsal, and then opening night.”

“Are you excited?”

“Yes, very. It’s what I’ve wanted for so long. I got a little taste of it with *West Side Story* summer before last, but this is exciting. I was surprised that I got Riff Raff.”

“For someone who is so incredibly sweet and kind, you make a really good creepy looking character. You totally transform when you play a role.”

“That’s the point – to convince the audience that I AM the character.”

“Well, you do it really well. No one who only sees you as Riff Raff would have any idea what a sweetheart you are.”

“You say such nice things,” Kurt teased. He turned sideways and ran his hand along Sam’s chest. “And as for your thoughts on losing your abs, it’s pretty much inevitable. Unless you’re going to follow some insane workout routine for superheroes in blockbuster movies, you’re eventually going to lose that six pack. And that’s fine. I won’t love you less if you have no defined abs. We’ll both change physically over time. Right now we’re young and we can have sex several times in a few hours, and if we stay up all night, we could go even more. Some day, that won’t be the case, but it won’t mean that I find you less sexy. It’s just life. I love you now and I’ll love you then.”

Sam sang imitating Adam Sandler, “All I wanna do is grow old with you.”

Kurt laughed. “Exactly. That is such an awesome and totally ridiculous scene.” He turned back forward and lay back against Sam’s chest again. He wrapped Sam’s arms around him and held his hands. This time it was Kurt who started to hum the song.

After the closing show of the 10-day run of the musical, Burt and Carole helped Sam get the food set out on the counter for Kurt’s surprise after-party.

“I take it you had never seen the movie?” Sam asked Burt.
“No, I hadn’t. I can’t believe THAT’S the musical Mr. Schuester tried to put on when you all were sophomores and juniors. Technically, none of you should have ever even SEEN that show, much less be IN that show.”

Sam laughed. “I hadn’t seen it before, but Kurt had. Most of the rest of the group had, actually. But it was absurd for him to try to put that on as a high school production in any town, much less a conservative rural town. Plus, you’re right, Tina and Rachel weren’t even 16 yet, so they were definitely underage, even if we’re going by consent laws and not the legal adult age of 18. Kurt and I were 17 at the time and we were the oldest in the group.”

“Well, the show was well done.” Burt said. “It’s not really my cup of tea, but they did a good job.”

Sam pulled his phone out of his pocket and checked it. “He should be here soon. Jeff just texted that he picked him up.” He moved into the space between the dining room and the living room. “Hey!” He got everyone’s attention. “Kurt should be here in five minutes or so. Come around to the kitchen.

Nick, Puck, Finn, Trish, Santana, Brittany, and Tina all moved to the kitchen. A few minutes later, Kurt came in, followed by Jeff.

“Sam?”

“In the kitchen.”

Kurt came around the end of the room into the dining room.

“Surprise!” everyone said.

“Oh, my God! I didn’t know that any of you were here.”

Santana said, “Isn’t that the point of surprise, Porce?”

He gave her a raised eyebrow and cocked his head, but spoke politely, “It is. It absolutely is. I’m starving. Let’s eat and then you can all tell me how things are going and what you are all up to. I’m going to go wash my face with real soap and water first though. That stage make up… yuck.” He went to the bathroom and came back a few minutes later. He went through the buffet that had been set up and took his plate outside to join everyone.

“It’s our first Thanksgiving with your family.” He ran his hand through Sam’s hair. “It’s been quite a while since we squished into a twin bed together.”

“It has, but we only end up using the extra space in our bed for things besides sleeping.”

Kurt laughed and turned to bury his face in Sam’s shoulder. “Shh. There are children in the room next door.”

“They’re asleep.”

“They won’t be for long if they hear me laughing. They’ll come to join in on the fun.” Kurt took a deep breath. “I’ll be quiet. They’d have to knock first anyway since we slid the bed down over the doorway.” He kissed Sam. “It’s hard to believe that we only have one more week of classes before finals start.”
“It’s been a fun semester. I really like the Improv Club. I’m glad they let non-theater majors join. And my guitar playing has improved quite a bit with the guitar class.”

“I like the Improv Club too. You’re really good at it. I was so worried it was going to be a repeat of high school, but it’s been really nice. Everyone wants to succeed, but they also help when they’re not the one in the limelight.”

“And we’ve made a start at meeting new people. We at least have a decent selection of acquaintances that we do things with occasionally. We haven’t just turned into crotchety old hermits.”

Kurt laughed again. “Stop. You can’t be funny when we’re supposed to be sleeping.”

Sam ran his arm down Kurt’s arm past his elbow, sliding down onto his waist and then down onto his butt and the back of his upper thigh and began to caress his skin gently. He pulled Kurt closer and guided their lips together and kissed him deeply and passionately. “I love hearing you laugh.”

“You’re not really making me think about sleeping, you know. With the fabulous kissing and your hand where it is.”

Sam pressed his lips back to Kurt’s. “Mmm hmm.”

They spent Thursday morning and part of the early afternoon at Dwight’s parents’ house. About 2:00, they left and headed to Mary’s parents’ house. They spent time when they weren’t eating playing games and meeting more relatives. Stacey brought the Twister sheet both places and all of the younger kids had fun playing while the adults enjoyed watching them.

Saturday morning, everyone got up and ate a quick breakfast together. As soon as they finished, Dwight brought in a Christmas tree from the garage. They got it in the stand and started decorating it. Kurt began to hum Christmas songs.

“Sing them,” Stacey said. “We know some of the words.”

Kurt nodded and started singing the words and the rest joined in when they knew the songs. Before lunch, they had the tree done and the lights up on the front porch.

When they went back inside, Stevie and Stacey followed Mary into the kitchen to get started on lunch. When they weren’t looking, Kurt and Sam put their presents under the tree, and then headed into the kitchen to help with the cooking. Dwight put the ornament boxes back in the garage while they cooked. Once they finished eating, they went back into the living room.

“You two are sneaky,” Stacey said. “You already put presents under the tree.”

Sam and Kurt sat down on the floor near the tree.

“You’re right. We did,” Sam replied. “We’re celebrating Christmas on December 1st this year so we can see you open your presents.”

“We’re not going to see you on actual Christmas?” Stevie asked.

“Not this year,” Sam said.
“Oh, okay. I know it’s a longer drive since we moved here and you moved to college. But being here is a million times better than in Kentucky. Should we open them now?” he asked.

“Hand everyone’s out first,” Sam told him.

Stevie handed a large flat package wrapped in brown paper to Dwight and Mary, who were sitting on the couch. Stacey reached for her own gifts and sat on the other side of the tree. Stevie went back to the tree, grabbed his, and sat in the recliner.

Stacey opened her gift bag first. She pulled out a deep turquoise sweatshirt cardigan. Where a school insignia would go on the front, there was a butterfly. She turned it around and gasped. “It’s a Lemon Meringue jacket! She’s my favorite character in the *Strawberry Shortcake* show and I never find stuff like this.” She looked at it more carefully. “Did you two make this for me?”

They nodded.

“Kurt sewed it and Sammy painted it?”

“Yep,” Sam said.

“It’s perfect.” She stood up and put it on. “I can wear this with everything. It will look nice with dresses and jeans. Regular hoodies don’t look that nice with dresses, but this one looks more like a sweater. I love it!” She practically threw herself at Sam and fell into his lap with her arms wrapped around his neck. “You are the best big brother ever.” She got up and plopped in Kurt’s lap next. “And you are the best big brother-in-law ever. Thank you.” She stayed seated in the space in the center of his legs.

He kissed her on the top of the head. “You’re welcome.”

Stevie went next. He pulled the tissue paper out of the top of his bag. He pulled out a hardback book. He looked at it for a second, but then opened it quickly. “How did you do this?” He flipped through more pages. “This is amazing!”

“What is it Stevie?” Mary asked.

“It’s *The Tales of Torence Fixerstein*. All of them. And my drawings. In a real book.”

Stacey got up and sat on the arm of the chair. “Let me see.”

Stevie showed her.

“That is super cool.”

“It really is.” He started to move the bag, but realized there was still something in it. He put his hand back in the bag and pulled out something wrapped in tissue paper. He unwrapped it carefully. “Oh, wow. It’s one of the magic bells that summons Torence.” He made it ring. “This is awesome. Did you make this?”

“I did — in my ceramics class at school.”

“It’s perfect. It looks just like I imagined it would.” He rang it again. He wrapped it back up carefully. “I’m going to put it on the shelf in my room. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Sam said. “And just so you know, Kurt edited your writing to fix up your punctuation. He didn’t change your story though.”
“Thanks. I need to learn how to do that the right way. I looked in books I have and tried to do it right by copying the way the writer did it, but I think I need an actual rule book.”

Kurt said, “They make books like that. We’ll look for a good one for you.”

“Thanks.”

Mary and Dwight opened their present.

“Oh, Sam. It’s beautiful. It’s the waterfall we went to in Cades Cove.”

“That’s really good, Son. You’ve really improved over the years.”

Sam smiled. “I’m glad you like it.”

“What about Sam and Kurt?” Stacey asked. “Don’t they get presents?”

“Mom and Dad gave us our present. Burt and Carole and Mom and Dad and Kurt’s Uncle Mark and Aunt Lydia got us tickets to go see Sebastian and Dylan and his Aunt Lydia in Paris. He hasn’t seen Lydia since he was 8.”

“That’s a long time,” Stacey said. “So, that’s where you’re going for Christmas?”

“It is,” Kurt said.

“I hope you have fun,” Stevie said.

“I’m sure we will,” Kurt said. “Are you ready to set the Jenga game up?”

“YES!” Stacey popped up and got the game out.

Sam pulled Kurt closer as they danced around the living room to a Manheim Steamroller Christmas playlist Kurt found on Spotify, sometimes laughing more than dancing, as they were when “The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy” began to play. Sam loosened his hold and began to pretend to be a stiff-jointed nutcracker. Kurt let go and started to twirl around, all while freezing and pausing when the music did. By the time the song ended, they were definitely laughing more than dancing. Kurt stopped the playlist when the song ended.

“That was fun. It’s over. The semester is over. No more tests, no more papers for at least a month.”

“A month in Paris.”

“I’m so excited. We need to go pack. Sebastian said to pack light. Does he not know me? Pack light? What a terrible thing to say.”

Sam laughed and followed Kurt down to their room.

“Well, I think we need to do what he says. I doubt he is intentionally trying to torture you.”

“Says you.”

Sam rolled his eyes. “I’m imagining that it’s going to be like New York or DC. There will be subways and trains and buses to deal with unless he lives within walking distance of the airport.”
Kurt flopped back on the bed. “I know. I know.” He sat back up. “I can do this. I never wait this long to pack, but these last two weeks have been nuts. Who decided it was a good idea to hold auditions during finals week? Ugh. But I got a part, so I’m glad about that.” He stood back up and began to examine the closet. Eventually he pulled out a selection of shirts, pants, and cardigans that could be mixed and matched to create a lot of different looks without needing a giant suitcase to take it all. By the time Kurt had finished folding everything, he realized that he still had too many things. He narrowed it down again and finally got everything in his small suitcase. “That’s it. I’m ready.” He started to put the rejected items back in the closet.

“I’ll take it out to the Nav.”

Kurt went in the kitchen and pulled out the dishes they had made to take with them and put them in a basket. Sam grabbed them when he came back in. Kurt double-checked everything and locked the door on his way out.

They got to Zanesville about an hour before everyone else. They helped Aunt Eunice put the leaf in her table, get it set for dinner, and the get all of the food set out on the counters.

Once everyone else arrived, they sat down to eat Christmas dinner together. After they ate and cleaned up, Kurt and Trish assembled the tree while Finn and Sam went out and hung lights on her porch. They decorated her tree together and sang Christmas songs. Finn brought *Elf* to watch as their Christmas movie for the evening.

Even though it was cold out the next morning, the teens went out horseback riding. When they came back, they had hot chocolate and played board games for a while, while Kurt washed the clothes they had worn outside.

Carole teased Kurt when she saw him. “I can’t imagine why you both don’t want your suitcases full of clothes to smell like a horse.”

Kurt laughed and pressed the start button before he joined them at the table.

Around 2:00 they put the games away to eat a late lunch.

“We are all good cooks, if I say so myself,” Aunt Eunice said.

“I agree,” Finn said. “I didn’t know how spoiled I was until I got to college. The food is edible, but it’s nothing like the stuff that Mom and Kurt and Sam and Trish make. And you too, Aunt Eunice.”

“Maybe you should take a cooking classes or something,” Aunt Eunice suggested. “You can learn.”

“Yeah, I should. Maybe next summer. I’ll need to be able make something besides sandwiches and bake pizzas before I even think about moving off campus.”

They enjoyed their meal and the conversation moved from topic to topic. It wasn’t long before it was 4:00 and time for Kurt and Sam to leave. They put their suitcases back in the Navigator. They hugged everyone and said their goodbyes.

“Have fun!” Carole said.
“Stay safe,” Burt added.

“We will. Merry Christmas!” Kurt called out.

They waved as they got in the Navigator to drive to Mark’s house. He drove them to the airport, allowing them to save the expense of paying for long-term parking.

“Hey guys!” Sam said, as they got close enough for Dylan and Sebastian to hear him.

Sebastian pulled Kurt into a hug. “Welcome to Paris.”

“Thank you for inviting us.”

“How it going?” Sam asked Dylan.

“University is great, but if I had known I was going to fall in love with a Frenchman one day, I would have paid better attention in French class.”

Kurt heard his answer and laughed.

Sam said, “I took Spanish for two years before we moved to Ohio. I remember very little of it.”

“I do okay most of the time with every day stuff, but if I had to go to school in French, I’d be done for.”

“Let’s get you out of here,” Sebastian said. “We’ll take your stuff home, eat, and give you a chance to freshen up, and then we’ll head back out.”

Sebastian unlocked the door to the flat. Lydia made it to the door before Sebastian managed to get his keys back in his pocket.

“Kurt, mon chou, look at you. I’ve seen all the pictures and how handsome you grew up to be, but you’re here. I’m so sorry. I’m so very sorry.” She began to cry.

Kurt left his suitcase for Sebastian to take care of and took Lydia’s hand and moved away from the others. Sebastian took the suitcase and the other two followed him through the room to the bedroom.

Kurt pulled her into a hug. “I’m not mad at you, Aunt Lydia. I never was. I was a child. There was nothing you could do from here. I know you had your own mother to take care of. You had already lost your father. You lost your husband, your best friend, and then your mother. That’s more than any person should have to deal with in such a short period of time. I’m not a child anymore. I know that there isn’t always a solution that has all of the outcomes someone wants. I’m just glad to have you and Sebastian back in my life. Thank you for letting us come stay with you.”

“Of course. You’re always welcome.”

“Try not to be so hard on yourself. Let’s just move forward from here. Let’s enjoy the time we have now.”

She saw Sebastian coming back into the room. “You always were the smart one.”
“Maman!”

“Well, I sent you to Ohio and you came back reformed. I know it was Kurt’s doing.”

“Fine. If we all admit that Kurt is amazing, can we let it go?”

“Sure,” Lydia teased.

Kurt reached out for Sam, who stepped closer and took it. “Aunt Lydia, this is my husband, Sam.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you. I’m so glad the two of you have come.”

“It’s nice to meet you as well.”

“I’ll let you two get changed or whatever you need to do. Lunch is almost done. I know that Sebastian has plans for all of you.”

“Oh, my God, it’s amazing up here!” Kurt said, as he pulled Sam into a hug. “We’re at the top of the Eiffel Tower!” He kissed Sam.

Sam wrapped his arms around Kurt and held him close. “We are. We definitely are. And it is amazing. I never thought I’d get a chance to do something like this. The view is spectacular.”

Sebastian and Dylan came and stood next to them.

Kurt began pointing. “I want to go there. And there. And definitely over there to Montmartre.”

Sebastian laughed. “We’ll work on it.” He took Dylan’s hand and led him a few steps away.

Kurt and Sam walked around the top, taking in the view from all the way around.

Kurt leaned into Sam. “I’m in a place I’d only ever dreamed of being with the man of my dreams.”

Sam stepped behind Kurt and wrapped his arms around him. He propped his chin on Kurt’s shoulder and began to sing.

_Sweet dreams are made of this_  
_Who am I to disagree?_


“I love you too.”

Sebastian said, “Are you two lovebirds done making goo goo eyes at each other?”

“Never,” Kurt shook his head.
Chapter 38

Sunday morning Kurt lay snuggled tight in Sam’s arms, back in their own bed. He lay still hoping to let Sam sleep longer since it was only 6:04am according to the clock and still dark outside. They had forced themselves to stay awake until 9:00 Ohio time the night before in hopes of sleeping until a reasonable time, which he had managed to do, more or less. He lay there thinking.

It had been an amazing month in France. Kurt had taken so many photos that he had burned five DVDs. Sam had filled a notebook full of sketches. They had visited so many of the places that Kurt had wanted to see. He couldn’t actually think of a single place he had wanted to go in Paris that they hadn’t gone to.

*One day I want to go back and see more of the country – the castles, the villages that look like time had stopped, and everything in between. I want to go everywhere and see every amazing thing. Me and Sam, traveling the world together would be so cool. Maybe some day.*

“Morning, gorgeous.”

“Did I move? I was trying so hard to hold still.”

“Your breathing changed.”

“I’ll have to figure out how I breathe while I’m asleep so I can keep doing it after I wake up so you can sleep longer.”

Sam kissed him on the back of the neck. “I wasn’t sleeping soundly anyway – jet lag. It’s Sunday Snuggle time anyway.” He ran his hand along Kurt’s arm and down his leg and back up. “Sexy snuggles with my sexy husband.”

Kurt took a deep breath and let it out. “I agree. I have a very sexy husband. I had amazing time with you in Paris. One day, if we can, I want to go more places with you. Every beautiful place – I want to go there with you.”

“Sounds perfect.” He kissed the back of Kurt’s neck, and then pressed his nose into the nape of his neck and breathed deeply. “Mmm. I confess that my ideas for today are straying past snuggling.”

“Oh? Some kissing?”

“A lot of kissing.” Sam began kissing down Kurt’s neck and across his shoulder. “Lots and lots of kissing.”

A couple of hours later, they were in bed still, sated several times over. Kurt was practically lying on Sam. Every part of their bodies were intertwined in some way.

“Feeling better now?” Kurt asked.

“Definitely.” Sam kissed him on top of the head. “I love you.”

“I love you too. More snuggles?”
“Yeah, but let’s listen to the book for a while.”

“I’d have to get up to do that.”

“Never mind. Quiet is good.”

“As you wish.”

Sam laughed. He ran his hand up and down Kurt’s back. “I already have what I wished for.”

As much as they both really wanted to lie in bed all day, they knew that they couldn’t. They had stayed in Paris as long as they could and they had to get ready for the new semester that started the next day.

Once they finally made it out of the bed, they checked their schedules, packed their bags and lunches, and worked on their second semester calendar. Kurt worked on a handwritten calendar while Sam cooked. Once they had eaten, they added everything in and made a M-F block schedule. They both looked at what Kurt had put on the preliminary calendars.

“Next weekend, after we’ve gotten all of our semester syllabi, I’ll input all of this into the computer and make a nice copy to keep on the wall,” Kurt said.

“We’re going to be crazy busy again until spring break,” Sam said. “Sunday mornings just have to be the time we tell everyone ‘no’.”

“Unless the school demands our presence, ‘no’ is the answer to any Sunday morning request.” Kurt blocked out Sundays until noon.

“That’s better. I’d like longer, but I’ll take what I can get. No chores then either. And we’ll have slices of banana bread and yogurt so we don’t have to make anything. And let’s make twice what we eat for Saturday dinner, so we can just eat leftovers for lunch on Sunday. I’m serious about our time together. We tried last semester, but we still let things push their way into our time. I need that time with you.”

Kurt got up and sat in Sam’s lap. He wrapped his arms around Sam’s neck and hugged him. “I need you too.”

He wrapped his arms around Kurt and kissed him. “We can do this.”

A very stressful month had passed since they had sat down to work on their calendars. Sam was not coping well with Kurt cancelling plans and rearranging his schedule randomly. He was getting frustrated with Kurt calling to be picked up at unplanned times, sometimes hours after Sam had expected Kurt to have already been home. All the while Sam had no idea where Kurt was because his phone was off due to department rules.

Sam had worked on a special Valentine’s dinner for Kurt for over an hour and right as he was about to back out to go get Kurt, he got a text rescheduling Kurt’s pick up time at theater for the 11th time in 11 days. He put the truck back in park, got out, and went back inside.

He sat down on the sofa really angry. He knew that there was no way to salvage what he had prepared and have it taste the way it should. He could put it in the refrigerator and warm it up later,
but it wouldn’t taste the same. Some things were really only good served freshly cooked.

He took a deep breath and got back up to go back into the kitchen. He pulled the plates out of the oven and turned it off. He took the foil off, ate the artichoke hearts, and then ate all of the eggplant as well. He sliced the chicken cordon bleu in half, lightly toasted some bread, added mustard, and made two half-sandwiches for each of them for their lunches the next day, and then put them in the fridge. He packed some baby carrots and peeled two oranges and added them to the sandwiches. He put the plates in the dishwasher and turned it on.

In an attempt to calm down, he went in the living room to practice his guitar for a while, but it wasn’t enough. He still had an hour left. He went in the study and used gesso to prime the three blank canvases that he had, which didn’t fill the remaining time and hadn’t accomplished his intended goal of calming him down.

He knew that Kurt hadn’t chosen to stand him up, but there had been nothing but non-stop stress since the semester started and the weight of it had come crashing down when he had gotten the text. He got Kurt’s yoga mat out and did crunches until he couldn’t do any more. He put the mat away and changed to doing squats. Once he had exhausted himself, the tears of frustration came. He took a shower and dressed in pajamas when he came out.

He drove to the theater and pulled into the pick up area in front. When he didn’t get another call delaying the pick-up time, he called the Thai restaurant and got no answer. He called the Chinese place with the same result. He realized that it was after 10pm on a Thursday and more than likely nothing but Taco Bell would be open. He leaned forward and put his head on his hands on the steering wheel. He jumped when Kurt tapped on the window for him to unlock the door.

“Sorry, sweetie. I didn’t mean to make you jump.” Kurt got in, closed the door, and slid to the center, putting his bags in the passenger seat. He clicked his seatbelt. “Hey, what’s wrong?” Kurt reached out for him and turned Sam’s face to kiss him.

Kurt’s kiss broke through his frustration and he kissed back. He put the truck in drive, pulled out of the pick-up zone, and drove back home.

“Your hair’s damp and you’re in your pajamas?”

“Yeah. I was exercising and I took a shower afterwards.”

A couple of minutes later, Sam pulled up and parked. They both got out. Sam opened the door and locked the door behind them. They both stopped to hang their coats up.

“It smells really good in here.”

“Why don’t you go take a shower? You can eat, and then we can take a bubble bath if you want.”

“Alright.” Kurt couldn’t figure out what was going on, but he took his stuff with him. He stopped in front of the laundry closet and put his dance clothes from his bag into the washer. He grabbed his other dance clothes from the laundry basket in the bedroom and tossed them in and left the clothes he had on in the basket. He put his school bag in the study next to their desk. He started the small load, and then went into the bathroom and showered quickly.

While Kurt was in the shower, Sam made him an omelette with some diced peppers and onions from the freezer.

Kurt came out in his towel. He looked at the plate confused, but took it. “Thank you.”
He sat down and ate while Sam washed and dried the skillet and spatula, and then put them away. As soon as Kurt finished, Sam took his plate and washed it as well.

Sam noticed the clock on the stove said 11:13. “If you’d rather, we can just go to bed. It’s already really late.”

“I think the washer has another 10 minutes before it’s done. I’ll go grab some pajamas. Maybe we can dance for a little bit?”

“Sure.” Sam connected his phone to the speaker and started some instrumental music. As soon as Kurt came back in the room, Sam wrapped his arms around him and held him close while they practically just swayed in place.

When the washer finished, Kurt kissed Sam gently and went to hang his clothes up. Sam disconnected his phone from the speaker, checked the doors, turned the lights off, and went into their bedroom. He turned the timer for the twinkle lights to an hour, undressed, started some Spanish guitar music at a very low volume, and got in bed.

As soon as Kurt finished hanging his clothes to dry, he joined Sam in bed. He realized that Sam wasn’t wearing his pajamas anymore, so he sat up and took his off and lay back down. He scooted over and laid his head on Sam’s chest.

“I know you’re not angry with me personally, but I know that you’re angry. I can’t apologize for the way the musical is going because it’s not me who keeps causing the rehearsals to run long. We open tomorrow night and the two main characters are still struggling. I’m not sure how it’s going to go tomorrow. I hope somehow between now and then, they manage to dig deep and find some way to portray the beginning part better. They seem about as interested in each other as I was in Brittany.”

“Yikes.” Sam ran his hand along Kurt’s arm.

“Yeah.”

“You’re right that I’m upset. I’m frustrated because I made chicken cordon bleu, the eggplant au poivre you love, and garlic and butter artichoke hearts for us for dinner. I spent a lot of time getting the food just right and the timing just right. I was in the truck, starting to back up when you texted the change in time.”

“Oh, sweetie. That sounds wonderful. I loved that eggplant dish when Aunt Lydia made it. And you know I love artichoke hearts. That’s why it smelled so good when I came in.”

“The chicken cordon bleu has been turned into sandwiches for lunch tomorrow. I ate the eggplant and artichokes myself because neither one tastes good reheated. Things have been so rough and I just wanted dinner to be really nice. It was delicious, but I wanted to eat it with you. I tried to get your favorite Thai, and then Chinese, while I was waiting for you to come out, but everything was closed because it was so late already. I should have just make a crockpot stew that would have been okay being served later than expected. It’s not like this is the first time you’ve come home late in the last five weeks.”

Kurt reached out and ran his hand through Sam’s hair. “I don’t know what to say or how to make this better. It was super sweet of you to go to so much trouble to make me a fancy dinner. Thank you. I really do appreciate all of the effort you put into it. I wish I had gotten to eat it with you.”

“Me too. I loved all the little notes you put in my bag and even in my glove.”
“You didn’t find the one in your wallet?”

“I didn’t buy anything today, but I’ll for sure look tomorrow. Let’s try to sleep. I know you have an early class tomorrow.”

Kurt scooted up and kissed Sam and got comfortable. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Ten days later, Finn, Trish, Burt and Carole attended the final performance. They had an early dinner together before the four of them left.

“We’ll see you in a couple of weeks,” Burt said, as they headed out the door.

Kurt nodded and waved. He closed the door and went and plopped down on the sofa. “It’s done.”

“It is.”

“I’m exhausted.”

“Spring break is in two weeks,” Sam offered cheerfully.

“I’m glad. How about we strip down, take a bubble bath, and get in bed to snuggle? I need snuggles.”

“I happen to have an unlimited supply of those, just for you.”

“Perfect.”

Kurt lay back against Sam’s chest and relaxed. “Spring break is for doing nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“Nothing.”

“Well, that’s a bummer. I was looking forward to unlimited bl–“

“Of course. Yes. Not ‘nothing’. We can definitely do that. Nothing that qualifies as work, unless it is a chosen activity like painting and sewing, which can be both for fun or work.”

“So I don’t need to cancel my order for those–?”

“You didn’t.”

“I most certainly did.”

“Sam!”

“What? You said you thought they looked interesting. I didn’t order 50 or anything. If neither one of us likes them, we’ll give them to Nick and Jeff and they can see if they do.”

“You can give them to Nick and Jeff.”
Sam rolled his eyes. “You’re blushing.”

“He repositioned himself. “We were robbed of Valentine’s Day, and two Sunday Snuggle mornings. I need lots of kisses.” Kurt turned his face and puckered up.

Sam met his lips with a peck. “Always kisses. Even if we’ve had our Sunday Snuggles.”

“I feel like it’s been ages since we just had time to talk and I don’t like it. I love performing, but if it’s going to overtake my whole life, then I’m not sure how interested I am anymore.” He pressed his lips back to Sam’s. “I promised to put you above all others and I’ve not done that lately. I know that we can say that it wasn’t a choice. And even though I can’t think of any way to have changed the last six weeks, I haven’t done right by you. I’m so sorry. I don’t know how to change it, but I need to figure it out.”

“You do realize that we can’t actually just do nothing for spring break.”

Kurt sighed. “I know. We’re leaving that Friday night to go to Aunt Eunice’s for the first weekend. Finn and Trish and Carole are driving from Lima and picking Dad up on Columbus on the way. It’s our first weekend of spring break and their last weekend. It will be fun. But when we come back, no work. We can hang around the house in our underwear all week and not even create any laundry to wash.”

“Oh, well that sounds like an interesting plan, which I’m sure you’ll change as soon as Nick or Jeff knocks on the patio door.”

“Wait. They aren’t even going to be here. They’re going to South Carolina.”

Sam laughed. “Gotcha!”

Kurt ran his fingers up Sam’s ribs, causing him to laugh even more. “Trickster. Tickles for a trickster.”

Sam put his hand over the top of Kurt’s and pressed down just enough to prevent him from tickling him anymore. “I love you. I’ve missed being tickle tackled. That’s definitely on the to-do list for spring break.”

Kurt slipped his hand out from under Sam’s and wrapped it around the back of Sam’s neck and turned his face to kiss him again, this time passionately. When they broke to catch their breath, he said, “I love you too. Are you ready to rinse off and move the snuggling and kissing to the bedroom?”

“Definitely.”

Friday morning of spring break, Kurt and Sam were in the study working on art and design projects when Kurt’s phone started to ring. He got up and went to the bedroom to grab it.

“Dad?”

“Yeah, kiddo. I need to you to pick me up in Cleveland in a few hours. It’s the first flight I can get back to Ohio.”

“What’s wrong?”
“Finn’s been in a wreck. I can’t get a flight to Toledo until tomorrow morning and I don’t want Carole to have to go to Columbus or Dayton to get me and not be there with Finn.”

“Is he going to be okay?”

“I don’t know. We don’t have any details yet. I have to get to the airport. I’m sure that Carole will call you once she has any news.”

“We’ll be there.” Kurt hung up. He sat on the edge of the bed and started to cry. He looked at his phone again when it buzzed for an incoming text message with Burt’s flight information.

When he didn’t come back, Sam went to look for him. He found him crying. “Hey, what’s wrong?”

“Finn’s been in a wreck and my dad is flying in to Cleveland. We have to go get him in a couple of hours. His flight lands at 12:30.”

“Is Finn going to be okay?”

“I don’t know. My dad didn’t have any details, but it must be bad if he’s flying out to come home immediately. We need to pack to stay for the weekend. We have school again on Monday, but we can stay the weekend.” He got up and grabbed some clothes and started to fold them. He put them on the bed. He took off the clothes he had on and changed.

Sam went to the bathroom, cleaned his hands, and came back in the room. He pulled out clothes as well. Kurt packed all of their stuff into a duffle. He grabbed their travel toiletries bag and packed it as well. He went in the kitchen and moved all of the leftovers to the freezer except a few things to have for an early lunch. He went back to the study and put his stuff away. Sam continued to work on his painting. He cleaned everything up and changed right before they left.

Burt got into the backseat as soon as he came out of the airport. He slid his small suitcase into the seat next to him. Kurt pulled out and headed straight to Toledo. During the nearly 2-hour drive no one felt like talking. Burt hadn’t heard anything else and Carole hadn’t called Kurt.

Once they were finally inside the hospital, they were met by a sobbing Carole.

“Trish is here too, in the waiting room.” Carole let Burt hug her before she started walking back towards the waiting area. “He’s in surgery. We don’t know anything still.”

They all sat down near Trish and waited. About an hour later, they heard “Family of Finn Hudson” called out. They stood up. The nurse came towards them.

“Go ahead and have a seat.” She pulled one of the chairs up and sat down as well. “I’m sorry someone didn’t come out here sooner. He’s been out of surgery for a while. The impact caused his appendix to rupture, so that was removed. He has a significant amount of bruising. He has two broken ribs and his left arm is broken, but it was a clean break. No pins were needed to set it and he shouldn’t need any surgery for that. It will heal on its own. He has a significant number of small lacerations on his face from the windshield shattering. They’ve been cleaned and bandaged. He was rushed into surgery when the CT scan showed the ruptured appendix. The rest of the issues were dealt with after he came out. He’s been sedated through the procedures. Removing the small glass pieces took quite a bit of time. He should come to fairly soon.”

Visibly trying to remain calm and speak without crying again, Carole said. “We still don’t even
“A deer ran in front of his truck or more like jumped onto the hood of his truck. It shattered his windshield and he drove off the road and hit a tree. Fortunately, the oncoming traffic was far enough back to stop before his truck crossed the center line and he wasn’t hit head on by another vehicle.”

Trish started to cry again. “It’s all my fault.”

Carole said, “I find that very unlikely. Unless you were the one that intentionally spooked the deer.”

“I stayed up all night last night to get this paper done that I had to turn before noon today. He left like he was going to class, but he left like an hour too early. I bet he was going to this little coffee shop we found to get me a huge coffee to help me stay awake all day.”

Carole ran her hand up and down Trish’s back, soothingly. “Well, whether he did or didn’t go out to get something for you, you didn’t make a deer jump in front of him.”

The nurse spoke again. “She’s right, honey. No one caused this but a spooked deer. He’s in recovery now, but someone will come out again in about a half-hour to tell you his room number. You can all go up to see him then.”

“Thank you,” Carole said. “There’s no brain trauma?”

“Not that we know of. He came in unconscious, so we’re observing him as he comes out from under the anesthesia. That’s why it will be a bit longer before he’s in a room.” She stood up and pushed the chair back to where it was on her way out of the room.

Carole let out a huge sigh. “That’s so much better than I had feared. His arm will heal and plenty of people get along just fine without their appendix. The small lacerations will heal and he can use some scar ointment on them and they probably won’t even be noticeable.”

“He’ll be sore with the broken ribs,” Kurt said. “But it’s so much better than what I was afraid of.”

“Me too,” Trish said, still sniffling. “He loved that truck. He’s going to be really upset that it’s messed up.”

“Mom?” Finn said, as he tried to focus his eyes.

“Yes, Finn. We’re all here.” She stepped closer to the head of the bed and touched the side of his face very gently.

“Where’s here. Why can’t I move?”

“You’re in the hospital, honey. You had an accident this morning.”

“I did? What happened?”

Trish was standing on the other side of the bed. “You don’t remember?”

Finn turned his head towards her. “Hey, babe.” He smiled at Trish. “Um, I remember you staying up all night and I went to get you some coffee to surprise you and help you stay awake.”
Trish broke down crying again.

“Come closer. Why are you so upset?”

“You got into an accident on the way to get the coffee. We haven’t seen your truck, but we were told that a deer jumped out in front of you and you drove off the road and hit a tree. I feel bad. I didn’t plan my time well and now you’re all banged up and your truck is probably totaled. You love that truck.”

He reached out and she took his hand.

“Hey, don’t cry. I love you way more than the truck. Maybe Burt can fix it. What exactly is wrong with me? I think they have me on too much stuff for me to know what hurts.”

Kurt laughed. He got up and stood next to Trish. “Probably. You have two broken ribs and your left arm is broken and in a cast. The windshield glass breaking caused a lot of small cuts on your face.”

Trish added, “And your appendix ruptured, so that’s why you had to have surgery.”

“Oh. Whatever they have pumping through me is doing a good job then because none of those places hurt. Nothing hurts. My mouth is dry. Can I have a drink?”

Carole said, “I’m sure you can. Let me ring the nurse now that you’re awake.”

The doctor came in a couple of hours later. He introduced himself and examined Finn before speaking to them. “You’re looking good. Were you experiencing stomach pain in the last few days?”

“Um, yeah. My stomach started hurting Wednesday, but I thought it was just because I ate too much lasagna in the cafeteria for lunch.”

“And did it go away?”

“Not really. It kind of changed, but it was still hurting. I just tried to ignore it. I ate less hoping that would help.”

“Well, I’m pretty certain that your appendix was on its way to rupturing, probably by tomorrow. Being in the accident just sped the timeframe up. You’ll be on IV antibiotics for a few more days and you’ll be able to go home probably on Monday. You’ll still have to complete a round of oral antibiotics. Taking them is of utmost importance.”

“Okay.”

“Your arm should heal up fine and the cast should come off in 6 weeks. It’s a waterproof cast. No need to worry about getting it wet once you can shower. You’ll be sore for quite a while with the broken ribs. No heavy lifting for 4-6 weeks with the combination of the surgery and the ribs.”

“Got it.”

“No dietary changes are required after an appendectomy. A couple of months from now, all of this should be healed up and you’ll be good as new.”

“Thanks.”
“It was nice meeting all you.” He headed out of the room.

Carole was the first to speak. “Well, that was good news. I’m so relieved.”

“What time is it?” Finn asked.

“6:23,” Trish responded.

“That would explain why I feel so hungry. I haven’t had anything to eat since last night.”

Carole said, “Press the nurse’s button and tell them you’re hungry.”

He did and about five minutes later, a nurse came in with a tray. Trish moved out of the way so the nurse could put it on the table. He slid it over to the bed and left quickly. Trish took the cover off the plate and the lid off the bowls.

“Well, you have vanilla pudding, chicken broth, and mashed potatoes. Mmm,” she teased.

“What ever. I’m so hungry that I don’t even care. Can you help me sit the bed up and put a straw in the broth? I’m not even going to attempt to use a spoon with it sitting that far away. I want to eat it, not wear it.”

That made everyone laugh.

Trish took the straw from his water cup and pushed the button on the side of the bed to raise the head of the bed up. She stuck the straw into the bowl with the broth and guided the straw into Finn’s mouth. It didn’t take long before the bowl was empty. She held the mashed potato and pudding bowls close enough for him to feed himself.

“Better?”

“For like 20 minutes, then I’ll need another dinner.”

Kurt laughed. “I think we can rule out head trauma.”

“I’ll go talk to the nurse and find out if we’re allowed to bring you other things to eat,” Carole said. She left the room.

Burt stepped up to the bedside, where Carole had been. He put his hand on Finn’s shoulder gently. “I’m glad you’re okay.”

“Weren’t you in DC this week?”

“I was. I flew into Cleveland on the first flight I could get. I rode over with Kurt and Sam.”

“Won’t you get in trouble or something?”

“No. I sent one my aides to the committee meeting I was supposed to go to this afternoon to take notes. I’ll read them and talk to her about the meeting. Don’t worry about me. You just need to rest so you can get out of here as soon as possible.”

“Yeah. If they’re going to limit me to the kind of food I got for dinner, I’ve got to get out of here quick – before I starve to death.”

Burt laughed.
Carole came back in the room. “You can have more of the same food tonight, if you’re hungry later. That’s the best you’re going to get for today since you had surgery earlier. Tomorrow you’ll get more of a variety.”

“I hope so. Actually, I’m really tired. I think I need a nap.”

A week later, Kurt came in before dinner, hung his coat up, and called out, “Sam?”

“Yeah, I’m here. I’m painting.”

Kurt took his bag down to the study. “You know how I wasn’t sure whether to feel disappointed or excited that I didn’t get a role in Midsummer?”

“Yeah.”

“Now, I’m certain that I’m glad. I found out that I was selected to work on the costuming and the pieces I’m doing will be my final project for the semester in my Costume Design course. If I had been cast, it would have been so stressful.”

“Well, then I’m glad you didn’t get a part. You’ve been in two productions this year. That seems like a lot to me for a freshman.”

“I think it’s enough. I know there were freshmen who didn’t get cast in anything. I don’t know if there were any that were cast in more than two. I think I prefer doing the costuming for a play that’s so late in the semester.” Kurt’s phone began to vibrate. He pulled it out of his pocket to look at it. “Why is Rachel calling me?” He answered her call. “Rachel?”

“Yes, it’s me, Kurt. I just had to call the one person who would know how much this means to me.”

“How much what means to you?”

“I auditioned for Funny Girl and I got cast as Fanny.”

“NYADA is doing Funny Girl? We just finished a 10-day run of Spring Awakening a couple of weeks ago.”

“No. Freshmen can’t be in NYADA productions. Funny Girls being revived on Broadway and I’m going to play Fanny.”

“Oh, wow. Well, congratulations, Rachel. I’m sure you’ll be a fantastic Fanny.”

“Thank you. Rehearsals don’t start until the end of May or some time in June, but I’m so excited.”

“It’s an amazing opportunity. Like I said, congratulations.”

“Thank you.”

“I’m sure you have other people to call. I won’t keep you.”

“I do.”

“Goodbye, Rachel.” Kurt ended the called and put his phone back in his pocket.
“I heard,” Sam said. “She was talking so loud that I could hear her.”

“I wish her all the best. Far be it from me to wish anything else, but it’s going to take a miracle to keep her from diva-ing out. She just said that NYADA freshmen aren’t allowed to be in the productions, so she’s 18 and the only real role she’s ever had was being Maria last year in *West Side Story*. She worked with Artie and two teachers who knew nothing about directing, which meant she called the shots when it came to how she performed. Going from a high school production straight to Broadway will be a culture shock for sure. And honestly, I’m envious. I knew deep down I would never best her, but I never considered that she would audition already. Then again, I didn’t know anyone was staging a revival of *Funny Girl*.”

“I’ve never seen *Funny Girl*.”

“It’s Rachel’s Favorite Barbra Streisand musical. The song she said for audition, ‘Don’t’ Rain on My Parade’ is from the musical.”

“I’ll be right back.” Sam stepped out of the room to wash his hands and came right back.

“I want to be happy for her, and I am, but I’m also envious. She will always have it easier and that’s just that, but it is frustrating. I’m glad I’m not in the same program with her. Watching everyone fawn all over her would drive me nuts.”

“Stand up for a second.” He waited. He wrapped his arms around Kurt and held him close. “It’s okay to be envious. It is. She pushed you to the background all the time. And now she’s being given a chance to shine. Only time will tell if this is a good move for her or not. Only you can decide whether you’re doing what you want to now or not. Are you regretting your choice of turning down your NYADA offer?”

Kurt let himself be held. He closed his eyes and thought. “I’m not ready to be on Broadway right now. I have so much more to learn. I’m learning a lot here. I don’t regret my choice. Not at all. Even if I get there some day, no amount of applause can make me feel like this.” He kissed up Sam’s neck. “What I want most is it this. No screaming fans can make me feel the way you do. You know the real me and you love me.”

“That’s true. I do love you. How about a pre-dinner snuggle?”

“Sounds great.”

Kurt was sitting on the sofa when Sam put his key in the lock. He hopped up and stood in the entryway. It was far from the first time he had done it and Sam laughed instead of jumping when he opened the door to find Kurt standing there waiting for him. Kurt let him get the door closed and relocked before he relieved him of his bag. He put it on the floor behind him against the wall and reached back up to wrap his arms around Sam’s neck and kissed him before he had time to speak.

“Well, hello to you too,” Sam said, once they broke apart to catch their breath.

Kurt didn’t let go of him. “Hi,” he said, as he started to kiss down Sam’s neck.

Sam started moaning. Before he let it go much further, he pulled back a bit. “Aren’t you supposed to be at the theater dressing people?”

“In two hours. My 3:00 class got cancelled. Come snuggle me?” He kissed Sam again and started
to walk backwards.

“Yeah. Of course.”

Kurt turned and walked to their bedroom. He lay down on the bed and waited for Sam to do the same. He scooted up close to Sam and wrapped himself around Sam.

Sam kissed the top of his head. “Is something wrong?”

“Everything is very right. I’m right where I belong.” He slipped his hand up under San’s shirt and put his hand over Sam’s heart. “It’s going to be a long 10 days since I’m working on the show. I just want to be with you before it starts.”

“Be with me?”

“Mmm hmm.”

“How?”

“Any way you want. I just want to make you feel loved because I love you so much.”

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An hour and 50 minutes later, Kurt hurried to Sam’s truck. Sam grabbed his backpack, locked the door quickly, and followed Kurt. He was met with more kisses as soon as he was in the driver’s seat. Sam had to focus to get his seatbelt on. Kurt sat back in his seat and put his on when he heard Sam’s click. He slid his hand over to Sam’s thigh.

Kurt took a deep breath and let it out. “Three more weeks.”

“We’ve got this.”

It didn’t take long for Sam to pull up to the loading area. Kurt took his seat belt back off and turned back to Sam and kissed him again.

“I’ll see you when the show is over.”

“I’ll just come back out and sit in the truck. Text me when you’re done and I’ll pull back up here. I’m going to go study for a while.”

“I know. You came home to study and didn’t get any studying done.”

“Oh, I studied plenty of things, mostly anatomy, very important for an artist, you know.”

Kurt laughed. “A+ on the thoroughness of your research.”

Sam leaned in for another kiss. “I think I need you to model for me again soon.”

Kurt met him halfway for the kiss. “We’ll work on arranging that. I’ll see you later. I love you.” He slid toward the passenger door to get out.

“I love you too.” Sam pulled forward and went to park after Kurt shut the door.

Kurt checked his phone on the way into the building. He had a text from Trent, asking him to call.

“Kurt!”
“Hey, Trent. I just now saw your text.”

“Thanks for calling back. I just wanted to tell you that I got into Juilliard! I’m going to study composition and conducting. My dad’s going to pay!”

“Trent, that’s fantastic news! I’m so excited for you.”

“I wanted to thank you personally. If it hadn’t been for your support, I probably would be headed to Columbia for pre-med. I still haven’t…”

“There’s not timetable for that. You’ve got four years ahead of you to study what you wanted to study. Focus on that. Work hard and make yourself proud of your own accomplishments. The other either will or won’t work out, but you loving your life will make a big difference either way.” Kurt pulled the door to the building open. “I’m on my way in to the theater to start dressing people for opening night. I’m going to have to let you go, but thanks for letting me know. We’ll get together again sometime soon. I’ll text you with dates and we can work it out.”

“See ya.”

Three weeks later, the first year of college was over for everyone. They opted to spend the weekend at Aunt Eunice’s. Late Saturday morning, Finn and Trish came in from riding and headed upstairs to clean up a bit before lunch. Kurt and Sam had come back about 10 minutes before they had and were helping set the picnic table for lunch when the other two came back downstairs. They grabbed a dish each and carried it outside. Carole came out behind them with the last one and sat down.

Before anyone picked anything up to start to serve themselves, Finn cleared his throat. “Um. So, this morning when we were out riding, I proposed to Trish.”

“And I said ‘yes’,” Trish said. She held out her hand for everyone to see her ring. It was an 8cm titanium band with a geometric pattern engraved into it.

“I thought a lot about a lot of the things that Kurt and Sam and I talked about and I really liked how Kurt got both of them rings to wear. You know, how they were equals and engaged to each other, not just that Sam wore a ring and Kurt didn’t since he was the one that asked. I guess I just didn’t like the idea that a lot of guys feel like they call the shots and that once a girl says ‘yes’ that she’s ‘tied down’, but without the same level of commitment since the guy isn’t wearing a ring. I’m not sure that I can explain it all that well.” He extended his left hand and show that he was wearing the same ring, but in a 12cm width. “Anyway, I got rings for both of us.”

Carole got up and looked at their hands. “I like them.”

Trish said, “Me too. Finn knew that I didn’t want any kind of ring that had a raised mounted stone. I didn’t even want one that had a ‘top’ to it. You know, like a flat mounted stone that was supposed to be on the center top of the ring? I’ve never worn rings and this one is perfect. It’s not gold or silver, so it won’t get damaged when I play sports. And I liked the part about him wanting other girls to know that he’s taken. I thought it was sweet.” She turned and kissed him near his temple.

“Well, congratulations,” Burt said. “Are you thinking of getting married soon?”

Trish answered, “We didn’t talk about it really.”
“That’s fine.” Burt picked up a plate of food and served himself some green beans and passed the bowl to Kurt.

“I’m really happy for you two,” Kurt said.

“Yeah, me too,” Sam added.

Once the food was passed around, everyone started to eat and talk again.

“You’re sure I can’t convince you to come back to Lima for the summer and work in the shop, Kurt?”

“I’m sure, Dad. I’m sorry, but we’re going to work in Kent. I had two interviews last week and one offer. I’m supposed to hear back from the second place on Monday.”

Sam spoke up. “Since we talked a few days ago, I got offered a position at a day camp that I interviewed for a couple of weeks ago.”

“We knew about the interview,” Carole said. “That’s great about the job offer.”

“It really is,” Sam said. “I’ve been assigned 3rd and 4th grade. The camp has a new theme every week, so it should be pretty fun. It’s not an art camp, but they do have an art time every day. That’s what really tipped the decision towards staying in Kent. I can’t really think of anything even remotely art-related that I could do full time in Lima.”

Burt nodded in understanding.

“Trish and I are both working at the Y camp this summer.”

“That’s cool,” Sam said.

They continued to talk about their summer plans as they ate.

“This has been a great mini-vacation,” Kurt said a couple of weeks later, standing out on the balcony of the DC apartment with Sam.

“It has.” Sam stepped behind him and wrapped his arms around Kurt. “And I loved our anniversary celebration.”

“Mmm hmm. You generally do love spending all of Sunday morning in bed with me.”

“I really do.” He kissed the side of Kurt’s neck. “I love you so much.”

Kurt stepped to the side just a bit and turned his head and kissed Sam. “I love you too.”

“I’m glad I held out to hear back from Stein’s Garage. I actually really like it there and the pay is good. I do feel bad that we’re only going to have the last two weeks off that Sebastian and Dylan are going to be in Ohio though. At least they were able to change their plans and come in August instead of July, even though it means waiting another month to get to see them.”

“I’m glad too. We’re going to be ready for a break when they get here. They’ll have fun on their road trip the first two weeks.”

“Yeah. I wish we could go with them, though.”
“I know. But we had fun the first week we were in Paris, even though they still had classes.”

“We did. We always have fun together. We better get inside and clean everything up. Dad and Carole will be here in a couple of hours.”

“I can think of something I want to do again before we clean everything up.” Sam kissed up Kurt’s neck.

“Oh, really?”

Sam started his job the next day, which he really enjoyed. Over the summer, they had quite a few TV series marathons with Nick and Jeff who split their time over the summer between Kent and Findlay. On the weekends, they went to different places that were within an hour or two drive.

They fell into a comfortable routine. Not having evening obligations like rehearsals and homework gave them more free time together than they had ever had. They cooked together, trying out recipes from all around the world. They danced and sang together. And they had their Sunday morning snuggles which spread into the afternoons frequently.

Sooner than seemed possible, August arrived. Sebastian and Dylan spent the first two weekends in Columbus with Mark and taking a road trip south and southeast of Columbus during their first two weeks in Ohio. They drove through Kentucky, Tennessee, North Caroline, and South Carolina.

By the time Sebastian and Dylan arrived the third weekend in August, Kurt and Sam were more than ready to spend two weeks with them. Dylan had gone to Niagara Falls with his dad before they had left to go back to Europe, but no one else had been before.

The Y camps were over for the summer just like Sam’s camp. Kurt arranged a trip for the eight of them to go. From there, they drove to the Adirondacks for a few days. Trish and Finn went back to Lima when they got back from the mountains.

The second week, they spent one day at Aunt Eunice’s and camped out overnight. The next day, they went to the adventure place with the ropes and zip lines and paintball that was nearby. They spent the last weekend back in Columbus with Mark.

The Evans family drove up and stayed with them in Kent over Labor Day weekend. They took everyone on a tour of campus and showed them the art building and the theater. They went back to the lake nearby to go swimming and hiking as well.

The school year started again the next day. Kurt got a role in the fall musical and worked on the costuming for the fall play. The crash of being so busy again hit Sam hard. It was a struggle to never be able to count on when Kurt would be home. This time around, Kurt began to see the distress sooner. He quit allowing himself to be kept past arranged meeting times, citing that he had another commitment to keep. Within a couple of weeks, people realized that Kurt was serious about not staying past 8:00, unless he was required to by a professor.

The end of the third week of September, Kurt and Sam got an email inviting them to the opening of Funny Girl for early October. Since Kurt was in rehearsals for Plain and Fancy, he couldn’t miss rehearsals to go. He replied back that they would attempt to come on a weekend after his production ended, if they could.
A few days later, he got a notification from Facebook, which he rarely bothered to look at, but what it said shocked him. He called Rachel. He tried to convince her that dropping out of NYADA was a bad choice, but she rebutted with some really cutting remarks about him playing it safe and not taking risks. He ended the call rather quickly, still insisting that she was making a mistake.

He looked up her reviews after opening night to find that she had done a fantastic job. He wrote to her again congratulating her on the great reviews.

Kurt took jobs making costumes, but paced himself and didn’t overwork himself the week before Halloween like he had the year before. This time he had the advantage of people knowing about his skill, so he had people lined up earlier in October.

Rachel called Kurt near the end of October. She told him about the opportunity to go to LA and have a TV show made about her life. Kurt cautioned her once again. He reminded her that Funny Girl and Broadway was what she had always wanted. She had everything she had ever dreamed of and that if she wasn’t happy, she should figure out why and not just walk away. He reminded her of her contractual obligations to the show and how much it would hurt the show for the lead to leave not even a month into the show. She wasn’t swayed. He gave up trying to convince her and ended the call as soon as possible.

Kurt and Sam finished out the fall semester and split winter break between Kent and Lima, spending Christmas Eve through New Year’s Day in Lima. During the time they were in Lima, they met up with Mercedes, Tina, and Artie for lunch one day. Mercedes was still attempting to work her way up in the music industry. Tina was studying drama at Brown and Artie was attending film school in New York.

The spring semester was less stressful because Kurt did not get a lead part in the musical, giving him less rehearsal time with a smaller chorus part. They spent spring break in DC with Burt and Carole, overlapping one weekend with Finn and Trish being there as well, like they had done at Aunt Eunice’s the year before.

Finn and Trish found a nice two-bedroom place to rent just a couple of blocks off campus that they had moved into the weekend they had to move out of the dorm. Kurt helped them decorate, just as he had said he would.

A couple of weeks later, Finn and Trish got married in a small, mostly family service in Trish’s backyard. For their honeymoon, Finn and Trish spent a week in a cabin along Lake Erie. Kurt and Sam stayed in a cabin not far away for the weekend before returning to Kent.

After several delays in the process, the pilot episode of Rachel’s TV show called That’s So Rachel aired mid-June. It was far worse than anything Kurt could have imagined.

Kurt and Sam spent the summer working at the same places they had the year before, as did Trish and Finn. Nick took an internship at an architecture firm in Akron for the summer. Jeff took a job at a plant nursery in Akron, hoping to learn about landscaping to work alongside Nick and their dads in flipping houses. He had finally chosen to study advertising and marketing.

Sebastian and Dylan didn’t come to Ohio that summer. Kurt and Sam started saving up for another trip to France.

At their Labor Day Cookout in Lima, Kurt heard through Finn, who found out from Puck, that Rachel was back to Lima after no one hearing from her for months and that she wanted to work
with the Glee Club at McKinley, but had been turned away because only faculty members were allowed sponsor school clubs and Miss Pillsbury was still sponsoring the club with occasional help from Coach Sue with choreography.

Kurt got one of the lead roles in the fall musical. He had quite a few orders for Halloween costumes and put the money he earned back for their trip to France. Some of Sam’s pieces were chosen for an art exhibit at a gallery in Akron and he sold four of them, putting that money back as well.

In October, they got an invitation to Dylan and Sebastian’s wedding in the mail. They had set the date for the second Saturday in December. Kurt and Sam were both relieved that they had already been saving up.

Burt ran for re-election and won his fourth term.

Kurt and Sam made it through the semester with less stress than the previous two years. They finished their final exams early Friday afternoon. They left for Paris on an evening flight out of Columbus with Mark that evening.

Sebastian and Dylan had their ceremony in a venue similar to a country club that had event rooms that could be rented. Sebastian’s and Dylan’s families and a few friends came. It was a simple affair and they had a party afterwards that lasted until the early hours of the morning.

Dylan and Sebastian opted to do something similar to what Kurt and Sam had done. As unusual as it might have seemed to outsiders, Kurt, Sam, and both sets of parents went with the newlyweds to the Loire Valley for three days together. Dylan and Sebastian had decided that the two of them could spend time alone together for a few days anytime, but it was probably their only opportunity to spend time with their families together.

Kurt and Sam had saved up enough to spend a few days in the Loire Valley when everyone else had gone back to Paris. They stayed in Paris for the rest of winter break.

Kurt got a role in the spring musical and work on the costumes for the spring play again. Sam began to spend his evenings working in the studios on campus in the evenings creating pottery and small sculptures. He had opened an Etsy shop early in the semester and began making custom sci-fi items and doing custom sketches, caricatures, and digital art.

They spent half of spring break in Lima since they had gone to France for winter break. Sam was offered a position at the camp he had worked at the summer before, which he took. Kurt went back to Stein’s to see if there would be an opening for the summer and he applied for it.

Jeff and Nick went to Findlay for the summer to work for their dads for the first time. Kurt got the position at Stein’s. Finn and Trish came and stayed in Kent for a weekend before their Y camps in Toledo started for the summer. Kurt and Sam went to Tennessee for a week before they started their summer jobs.

Much to Kurt’s surprise, Rachel was at the callout meeting for the Improve Club the first Tuesday of the semester. She took the seat next to him, and since he didn’t want to make a scene, he said nothing. Sam came in a couple of minutes later and saw her. He took a seat in the row behind Kurt and just waited for the activity to begin.

Afterwards, she followed them out of the building and explained that she had spent the previous
school year auditioning and taking small parts in Toledo and Dayton community theater productions and she applied to a few schools in Ohio, using references from the community theater directors and co-workers. Kurt just nodded and listened. She told him how a few of her NYADA credits didn’t transfer and that she was technically a freshman, but that she planned to take courses over the summer to have enough be a junior by the fall. They stood around and listened to her chatter for a while, but eventually managed to extricate themselves and head home.

Kurt’s audition for the fall went well and he was cast in the musical. He continued to work on costuming for the other theatrical productions. He also worked hard on the part he had in the New York Showcase early in the spring semester.

As much as they wanted to go to France, they spent a few days in Lima instead because Kurt needed to stay in Kent over break to work on the Showcase pieces. He knew full well that as soon as the spring semester started, he would be buried in rehearsals for Thoroughly Modern Millie because he had gotten the lead male role of Jimmy. Sam worked hard on his senior project.

It was a tough semester for both of them, both academically and emotionally. They knew their time as students was coming to an end and the real world of finding jobs and providing for themselves completely was fast approaching. A lot of days, they seriously considered the idea of staying in Kent for another year, working and saving up. Other days, they were determined to make the move to New York. They also applied to graduate schools in New York and Paris, at least considering the option of more schooling if they got scholarship offers.

Rachel hanging around all year like she was waiting to reclaim the title of Kurt’s best friend didn’t help Kurt’s nerves either. He did not appreciate her efforts to ingratiate herself into the department by riding his coattails. He had worked hard for the standing and respect he had in the department and she was constantly trying his nerves.

By the middle of April, Kurt had a few offers of auditions from the showcase, but he couldn’t leave Kent to go to them since he was working on the costuming for the spring play. They had also gotten answers from the schools they had applied to. They both got into a couple of the programs they had applied to, but hadn’t gotten enough in financial aid offers to make it financially doable.

M-14-2016

The weekend before, Carole, Burt, Kurt, and Sam had gone to Trish and Finn’s graduation in Toledo. This weekend, the four of them travelled to Kent to attend Kurt and Sam’s graduation.

Over lunch at Kurt and Sam’s, Finn and Trish talked about their plans. Finn applied for jobs teaching in Columbus, which is where Trish had gotten a scholarship for graduate school. They were moving into Finn’s room in Lima and moving their furniture into the dining room until they could find a place in Columbus. Jeff and Nick hadn’t found positions anywhere yet, but were still looking and had set up a couple of interviews.

Kurt and Sam had found a furnished place in Manhattan to rent until the beginning of July. They had six weeks to find jobs and another place to live. Howard, Jerry, and Burt agreed not to put the house up for sale until the second weekend in July to give the guys time to find new places to live, while still allowing an investor time to find renters for the fall semester.

After lunch, Burt, Carole, Kurt, and Sam went to Akron so that Burt and Carole could see Sam’s second gallery exhibit. Quite a few of the pieces had already been bought. Since it was the last day of the exhibit, they brought the rest of the pieces back home with them. The other four headed to Lima from the gallery.
By the time Kurt and Sam went to bed about 11:00, everything that could be packed was already in boxes and stacked in the closets.

When they got up the next morning, they spent some time snuggling and took one last bubble bath in their amazing tub while the bed linens washed. They ate what was left in the fridge while the dryer ran. One it was done, they folded and packed everything, except the quilt, which they put back on the bed for the house staging.

They took their suitcases outside to the Navigator and the truck. They went back in one last time to make sure the lights were off and everything was set for the showings. Quite a few tears were shed as they walked through the house hand in hand talking and thinking about all of the memories they had made over the four years they had lived there. Eventually time pressed them to stop reminiscing and lock up.

They drove to Lima, where they left their vehicles. Carole drove the two of them and Burt to Toledo to fly out. They got their luggage out, hugged, and said their goodbyes before she pulled off. Kurt and Sam got in line to check their luggage after giving Burt one more hug. He hurried off to get through security because his flight was schedule to take off before theirs. They went through security and headed to their terminal to wait.

They arrived at their apartment about 9:00 that night. Kurt unlocked the door and they pulled their luggage in.

Sam found the light switch and flipped it on. “It’s definitely small,” he said. “It’s about the size of our living room.” He locked the door behind them.

“But at least it looks clean. Let’s see if we see anything with the black light we got.” He took it out of his satchel.

Sam turned the light back off. They examine the sofa, opened it up to examine the fold-out bed, the throw rug, and the curtains.

“Nothing,” Sam said.

“Good. That means someone either fumigated, and then cleaned, or there haven’t been any in here. Do you want to unpack or just shower and get ready for bed?”

“It’s not that late. Let’s unpack. I know we’ve got to hit the streets in the morning and see what we find.” He flipped the light back on.

Kurt wrapped his arms around Sam. “We’re here. We’re in New York City.”

“We are.” He kissed Sam.

“I miss everyone already. This is going to be really hard. We had an amazing time living next to Nick and Jeff. So many TV series marathons, movies, games, and just being together and now they’re so far away. And the weekends with Trish and Finn. And even the occasional visits from Santana and Brittany and our trips to Columbus. And we can’t just drive to Aunt Eunice’s and ride the horses. I’m going to miss them too. I’m just being whiny, but I’m scared.”

“I know. Me too. If living here doesn’t seem like it’s what we want to do, we can move
somewhere else after a year of giving it a chance. For now, we find some place to live and find jobs. We’ll put our all into it making it work.”

“You’re right, of course. And we have each other.” He tipped his head back so that he could kiss Sam. “I love you. There’s no one else I would want to attempt such a crazy thing with.”

“Me neither.” He kissed Kurt. “I love you too.”

A little more than a year later, they were standing in their kitchen area leaned again the counter. “Five years. We’ve been out of high school and married for five amazing years.”

Rather than alcohol, which Kurt had never acquired much of a taste for, they were drinking sparkling cider.

Sam added, “Here’s to another 70.”

Kurt clinked his glass against Sam’s gently. “Here! Here!” Kurt said, happily and took a sip before he put his drink down on the table nearby. “Did you get an email from Rachel today?”

“I did, but I didn’t open it.”

“Since we didn’t go to the reunion last weekend, she sent us an update on the McKinley Class of 2012, plus Tina and Artie.”

“Oh, okay. So, what did it say?”

“Most of it was stuff we already knew. Santana and Brittany got married in Lima last summer. They opened a dance studio in Columbus. We already knew all of that.”

“Right.”

“Rachel just finished her third year of college. Artie graduated from film school – no job listed yet. Tina graduated from Ohio State and majored in education. She’s already gotten a position as a teacher in Columbus.”

“That’s cool. It’s too bad she didn’t like Brown since she wanted to go there so badly.”

“It is, but we know that she loved Ohio State. I think she’ll be a really good drama and chorale teacher. Let’s see. Puck is an electrician, which we also already knew.”

“And Finn is working as a coach and PE teacher in Columbus and Trish is still in school.”

Kurt took another sip. The oven timer went off. He turned and pulled the baking dish of lasagna out and put it on top of the stove to cool. He pulled his phone out and sat down at the table.

“Mercedes is still in LA. Her CD is set to drop next fall.”

“Which we also knew.”

“I know. Mike is here in New York, which we also knew. Who did I leave out?”

“Quinn and Blaine.”

He scanned the email. “She graduated from Yale last year and got a role in an indie film that won
some awards.”

“Good for her.”

“Blaine graduated from NYU. He and Wes got married two years ago. They live here in New York. Oh, I got an email from Dave. He got that promotion and is moving out to Denver.”

“Cool. What did she write about me?”

Kurt read directly from the email. “Sam Hummel-Evans – Married to Kurt since June 2012. Summa Cum Laude BFA from Kent State University in Sculpture and Expanded Media and Jewelry/Metals/Enameling. Currently works as a freelance designer for specialty items for a variety of theatrical production companies and fashion designers in New York City, as well as his part-time position in the art department at Vogue.”

“She didn’t write that. You did.”

“I wrote both of ours. Mine says, ‘Kurt Hummel-Evans – Married to Sam since June 2012. Summa Cum Laude BFA from Kent State University in Musical Theatre and Costume Design. Currently works on Broadway as Cornelius Hackl in the revival of Hello Dolly!, as well as his part-time position at Vogue.”

“That’s it?” You had like a bunch of roles in musicals at Kent State that you didn’t list. And here you were in The Book of Mormon for three months, replacing that dude that broke his arm, and in Hamilton for three months before you got the role you have now.”

“The people who actually care already know those things.” He got up and cut the lasagna and put it on plates and carried them to the table. He kissed Sam on the side of the neck as he put his plate in front of him. “Happy anniversary.”

“We did a good job. It looks fantastic.”

“It does.” Kurt took a bite. “It came out great.”

They finished eating in silence, enjoying the meal they had prepared together. When they finished, they packed up the leftovers and cleaned everything up. They moved to sit on the sofa together. Sam propped the throw pillows and leaned against them. He put his right leg out on the coffee table and made room for Kurt to sit up against him.

“Are you happy here?” Sam asked.

“I’m happy with you.”

“I know, but are you happy here.”

“Sometimes. Other times, I think about our life in our little house in Kent and I miss it. This place is cramped and there’s not much natural light. It’s noisy all the time and the white noise machine gets on my nerves sometimes. We turn it on and music too. We make noise to block the noise. And yet, we can’t really make noise of our own or the neighbors complain. I like working on Broadway and at Vogue. We can’t afford anything nicer than this because my work could end at any time and so could yours. We have to live on a shoestring budget to make sure we save enough to be able to live for a few months without any pay. It’s a trade off. I’m not sure which way the balance is tipping most days. What about you?”

“Pretty much the same. I know with your current role, we have to stay until next April, but between
now and then, let’s do a bunch of research, just like we did when we looked at colleges.”

“Excellent idea. I have one of my own.”

“What’s that?”

“Let’s shower and move the snuggling to our bed.”

Sam changed to a posh British accent. “That is an excellent idea, my good fellow. Onward, shall we?”

Kurt laughed and got up.

A few days later, Burt and Carole were in town to see Kurt’s show.

“Kurt, honey, you were fantastic,” Carole said when she was finally able to get close enough for him to hear her. She pulled him into a hug. “I need you to sign my playbill.” She handed it to him.

He signed it and gave it back. “I’m so glad you guys could come. It’s a madhouse here though. Why don’t you and Dad head down the street and find a place to sit for a bit? I’ll do what I can to meet you soon, but there are a lot of people here.”

She nodded and Burt stepped forward. “You were amazing, kiddo. You did it. Well, you did it months ago, but we finally got here to see you. I’m so proud of how hard you’ve worked.”

“Thanks, Dad. Go with Carole. Sam and I will meet up with you two as soon as I can.”

“And the winner for this year’s Tony Award for best featured actor in a musical goes to Kurt Hummel-Evans for his role as Cornelius Hackl in the revival of Hello Dolly!”

Excited screams were heard in Nick and Jeff’s living room as Finn and Trish, Santana and Brittany, and Tina gathered to watch the Tony Awards in Columbus. Equally enthusiastic whoops were heard in Burt and Carole’s hotel room.

“He did it! He won!” Burt said proudly. “He won.” Tears streamed down his cheeks as he remembered the shows Kurt put on when he was a little kid.

Kurt made it to the stage to accept his award. He took it from the announcer and held it. “I would like to thank all of the wonderful people that are a part of Hello Dolly!” He looked around the audience and nodded and smiled to a few people in the cast he saw. “You have all been amazing to work with.” He looked toward the camera. “And I’d like to thank my family and friends for all the love and support, especially my father.” He looked towards where he had been sitting. “And finally, I like to thank my amazing husband, Sam, for supporting me through thick and thin.” He looked back and scanned the audience as he spoke. “For any young people watching, just remember that dreams, even the ones that seem so far beyond the scope of reality that they are more of a fantasy than a dream – even those dreams can come true, if you put your all into making them a reality.” He exited the stage with the presenters for the press photos.
A little over 14 months had passed since the Tony Awards. “Why did we say that we’d do this?” Sebastian asked.

“Because you were in Ohio the first two weeks and with us in New York for the past week. You only have nine days of vacation left and you love me,” Kurt sassed back.

“Right. But I better get a really good dinner after helping you move boxes and furniture.”

“Of course,” Sam said. “But first, less complaining, more moving.”

“So, I want to see them,” Sebastian insisted.

“See what?”

“Your Tony Awards.”

“Award.”

“But the musical won as well.”

“The cast doesn’t get an award for that. The producers and the writers do. Just like when a cast album wins a Grammy. The singers didn’t get an award. Just the composer, the producer, and the lyricist.”

“Oh, okay.”

“You’ll have to wait until we unpack the boxes that say ‘living room’ to see it.”

“I know the show closed, but you could have auditioned for other parts. Why move to Nowheresville, TN? I know I asked before, but you didn’t answer me.”

“I’ll answer. Are you two going to stay in school forever?”

“That’s the current plan.”

“We were losing ourselves in New York. It’s amazing and it’s awesome and it’s time-consuming and noisy. It takes forever to get groceries, forever to get to where there’s space to breathe, and we were only getting scraps of time together with Sam working on projects for different theaters and us working at Vogue in the mornings and me at the theater all evening and into the night. If I were single, it wouldn’t have been that bad. We did a lot of research. We’re honestly not sure where we want to go or do in the long run. But we bought this 3-bedroom, 2-bathroom house with a workshop in the garage for twice what we’ve paid in rent for that barely-more-than-efficiency we’ve lived in for the last two years. Plus, Sam was paying for co-op space to work on projects in the evening because our place was too small to do anything in. We paid for this house outright with the savings we had. We need some fresh air. We need some space. We need to find ourselves and each other again. He’s more important to me than getting another Tony Award. I did what no one thought I could do, even me sometimes. I don’t have anything left to prove to myself or anyone else. I think I can finally learn to let go and just be. Here we have a bedroom, a studio, a guest room, and our own fenced-in yard. There we had a shoebox with a view of an alley and too many noisy neighbors.”

Sebastian nodded. “I guess I just figured that if you left New York, you’d go back to Ohio.”
“Dad is running for re-election the last time this fall. If he wins, he will have spent nine years in office by the time he quits. He had never considered politics, but he’s done his best and he’s not going to continue past this term. If we love it here, they may consider relocating. Or we’ll just set aside time to go visit them there. He knew I would never move back to Lima.”

“I knew you wouldn’t go back to Lima, but I really thought you’d move to Columbus. That’s where Trish, Finn, Nick, and Jeff are. And they all like it there.”

“We considered it. We may still end up there. We’re going to give this a try first. We’re near Nashville. We can take the train in. It’s no different than living in Brooklyn and commuting, except that it’s nice and quiet here. There are theaters and places for Sam to get commissioned work there.”

Dylan came in the room. “There you are. You two are slackers.”

Kurt and Sebastian followed him out of the room and started unloading more boxes and helped move the furniture in. Even though it had been years since his injury and surgery, Sam still refrained from lifting heavy objects, not wanting to risk being unable to earn a living doing what he loved. Eventually they got everything inside.

“Alright,” Sam said. “To the U-Haul drop off, and then to the amazing dinner you so rightfully earned. It’s southern BBQ time.”

“A few more inches and I’ll be as tall as you,” Stevie said, as he walked up to the porch two weeks after Dylan and Sebastian had left.

Sam puffed his chest out. “But I’ll always be your big brother, even if you get taller than me.”

Stevie rolled his eyes and let Sam pull him into a hug. Stacey was already hugging Kurt.

“It’s going to be so fun for you to live near us,” Stacey said. “We haven’t lived near each other since forever ago.”

“That was forever ago.”

Sam held the door open as the three of them stepped up onto the porch. They walked through the door and through the living room into the kitchen and dining room area and put the food they had brought in on the counters.

“Kurt said, “I can’t believe Stevie’s a sophomore and Stacey’s in the 8th grade. There’s everyone else,” Kurt said, looking down the road. “I’ll wait here. Go ahead and help them.”

Dwight pulled up with Carole and Burt. They got out and brought their suitcase in.

“That train station nearby is nice,” Carole said.

“It is,” Kurt agreed. “Come on in. Sam, Mary, and the kids are in the kitchen setting stuff up.”

Burt and Carole stopped to hug Kurt on the way in. Kurt took their suitcase and took it into their spare bedroom, and then went to the kitchen. Everyone was lined up to get their food, which they took out back to eat on the convertible picnic tables that Dylan and Sebastian had helped them build and stain.
“This is a nice place, boys,” Burt said. “You like it so far?”

“We do,” Kurt said.

Sam scooted closer and put his head on Kurt’s chest. “Hear the crickets? It’s perfect. I can tickle you. We can dance whenever we want to whatever music we want. You can tickle me. We can sing and laugh. I love you so much. I didn’t even realize how on edge I’d become.” He went into full octopus snuggle mode, causing Kurt to laugh.

“I love you too. I’m not going to try to get away. I’m yours. All yours. Always yours.” Kurt paused for a second, making sure to say it correctly. “Metxe’lan ‘awsteng mi time’em.”

“Metxe’lan frakarr ‘awsteng mì time’em.”

“You added a word.”

“Two hearts together forever in harmony.”

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